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SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

EVANGELICAL,

DEVOTIONAL AND PRACTICAL,

ADAPTED TO Samt. Miller.

THE PROMOTION OF

CHRISTIAN PIETY,

FAMILY RELIGION,

AND

YOUTHFUL VIRTUE.

BY JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME II.

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SERMON

SERMON XXVI.

Christ's Miracles recorded, that Men might believe.

JOHN xx. 30, 31.

And many other signs truly did Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

AS God has made us rational creatures, the religion which he requires of us must be a rational service. Faith, which is the great principle of religion, must be founded in evidence. Reason, in the fallen state of our nature, could never discover all the things necessary for us to know.

It would never inveſtigate the way in which, and the terms on which, ſinners may regain the loſt favour of God. For our knowledge of theſe things we muſt be indebted to revelation.

To judge of the evidence, by which the truth of revelation is proved, muſt be the province of reaſon. God never requires us to believe any thing propoſed to us, without competent evidence of its truth. Whenever he ſends to men a revelation of his will, he ſends it accompanied with demonſtration of its divine original.

The goſpel revelation came to the world in this manner :—It began to be ſpoken by the Son of God himſelf, and was confirmed by them who heard him. The diſciples, whom he choſe for his attendants, were witneſſes of his doctrines and works : And they not only related them to others in that age, but have left a written narrative for the benefit of ſucceeding ages ; and this narrative is handed down to us.

The Apoſtle John, having given a ſummary hiſtory of Chriſt's works, ſubjoins this general obſervation ; " Many other ſigns did Jeſus, which are not written in this book ; but theſe are written that ye might believe him to be the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name—."

I. It is here ſuppoſed, that the miracles performed by Jeſus Chriſt, were a ſufficient evidence of his divine authority.

Miracles, which are effects produced above the common powers of nature, and in a way and manner

ner different from its ordinary and ſtated courſe, plainly diſcover God's immediate interpoſition. And from the goodneſs and faithfulneſs of God we may certainly conclude, that he never will immediately and ſupernaturally interpoſe to give ſuch credibility to a falſehood, that men, judging rationally, muſt receive it as a truth. It was therefore a juſt concluſion of Nicodemus, that Jeſus muſt be a teacher come from God, becauſe no man could do the miracles which he did, except God were with him.

The miracles of Chriſt were great and numerous. He conſtantly appealed to them as divine ſeals of his miſſion, and on them he placed the credit of all his doctrines. To ſuppoſe that God, in ſuch a caſe, ſhould enable an impoſtor to perform theſe ſtupendous works, or ſhould perform them for him, is contrary to all our ideas of his moral character. All moral evidence depends on the veracity of God. They who ſaw Chriſt caſt out devils, heal the ſick, raiſe the dead, ſtill the tempeſts, only by a ſingle word; and afterward yield himſelf to death; and then, exactly according to his prediction, riſe from the dead, aſcend into heaven, and ſhed down on his diſciples the promiſed gifts of the ſpirit; could not rationally doubt, that he was, what he declared himſelf to be, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; and that, conſequently, all his doctrines were true, his precepts pure, and his whole religion a heavenly inſtitution.

II. As these signs were evidence to those who *saw* them, so the *record* given of them is evidence to *succeeding* ages. This the evangelist teaches us, when he says, "These signs are written that ye might believe." For if they could be evidence only to those who saw them, there was no reason why they should be written; nor would the writing of them be a mean of faith.

The apostle observes, that Christ performed them in the presence of *his disciples*. Most of them indeed, were wrought in the presence of multitudes: But as the disciples were to be witnesses of them to the world, the evangelist particularly mentions this circumstance, to give credibility to their testimony. That which they saw and heard, they declared to others. They did not relate Christ's miracles on fame or report, but from their own immediate knowledge. They testified that which they saw, and their testimony is worthy of belief.

The disciples of Jesus were credible witnesses of the facts which they related; because it was not possible that they should be deceived; they could be under no possible temptation to deceive others; nor was it in their power to have deceived mankind, even if they had formed such a design.

1. They could not be mistaken themselves in the matters, which they relate, but must infallibly know whether they were true or not.

The miracles, which they have recorded, were matters which fell under their own observation, and were subject to their own senses. Whether they

they ſaw the dead riſe; the ſick and lame healed; ſtorms compoſed; thouſands fed with a few loaves; and, beſure, whether they were themſelves able to work miracles and ſpeak with divers tongues; whether Jeſus, who was crucified, actually roſe and appeared to them; whether they converſed with him, ſaw his wounds, and heard him communicate his inſtructions to them; were facts in which they could not poſſibly be miſaken. If their ſenſes, in ſuch plain, obvious matters, could deceive them, we cannot truſt our ſenſes in any caſe. If their relation of facts is not true, they muſt have aimed to deceive mankind. But,

2. They could be under no temptation to relate theſe things, if they had not known them to be true, becauſe, by their teſtimony, they expoſed themſelves to the loſs of every thing that is deſirable, and to the ſuffering of every thing that is terrible, in this world. Poverty, reproach, perſecution and death, were the conſequences of their perſeverance in their teſtimony, and conſequences which they foreſaw, and which Chriſt had warned them to expect. And it can never be imagined that a number of men, in cool blood, ſhould combine together to ſacrifice every thing that is dear in life, for the ſake of impoſing a falſehood on the world—ſhould all ſteadily perſevere in this deſign, after they began to feel the conſequences of it, and ſhould even perſiſt in it till death, and none among them ſhould deſert the cauſe and diſcover the fraud. Such a com-

bination, ſo executed, was never known, or heard of, nor is human nature capable of it. And,

3. If they had been diſpoſed to deceive mankind in theſe facts, it was not in their power to do it, nor could it be in their thoughts to attempt it. The facts which they relate, and the doctrines which they deliver, are ſo great and wonderful, that it is abſurd to ſuppoſe a number of men ſhould frame them out of their own invention. Had not the things which they declare been true, they could not have maintained that uniformity and conſiſtency which appear in their teſtimony: Much leſs could ſuch a number of perſons have been conſiſtent with one another. And if their teſtimony had not been true, it was, in the time of it, eaſy to detect the fraud and prevent it from ſpreading. The facts which they relate, they declared were done publickly; in the view of the world; and then very lately. And had there been no ſuch miracles, there would have been no credit given to their report. The diſciples had enemies who wiſhed to confound them. The Jews, eſpecially their rulers, ſpared no pains to ſuppreſs the chriſtian cauſe. Their enmity to it would have prompted them to convict the diſciples of falſehood, if they had not known, that the facts related were indiſputable. Had they diſcovered any impoſture, they would immediately have made it publick. And ſince they never denied the facts aſſerted by the apoſtles, but rather denied the conſequences of them,

they

they must undoubtedly have been convinced, that they were real, and not fictitious.

Had not the miracles, said to have been wrought by Jesus and his disciples, been real, the gospel never could have gained so extensive credit, as in fact it did; and if it had not been then received, it would have been more difficult to introduce it, and give it a spread afterward: For it is always more easy to establish a scheme when it is new, than to revive it, after it has been rejected and proved to be false.

The sacred writings carry in them an air of honesty and impartiality. They are of a holy nature and beneficial tendency. The pious and exemplary lives of the apostles proved them to be under the influence of the religion which they taught; and their dying in defence of it shewed, that they firmly believed it to be divine. Its wonderful success, without the support of human power, demonstrates, that it was patronised by heaven. The gospel history comes down to us with the passport of all former ages, and with every circumstance of credibility that can possibly attend any history.

There are four men, who have professedly written memoirs of the life of Jesus Christ. Two of them were his attendant disciples; the other two were contemporary and conversant with his disciples. Four others have written epistles to particular societies of christians, or to christians in general. In these epistles they recognise the

character, assert or allude to the miracles, and teach the doctrines of Jesus, as they are related in those memoirs. So that this history stands on the credit of eight different persons, most of whom were the immediate disciples of Jesus, and all of them his contemporaries. They wrote separately, on different occasions, without the least appearance of concert or collusion; and yet all substantially agree. To some of the principal facts there is the concurrent testimony of heathen writers. These memoirs and epistles were received as genuine, in the apostolick and next succeeding age, and from age to age, down to the present time. In short the gospel history, if considered merely as human, is better authenticated than any other ancient history extant. If we doubt its truth, we must doubt the truth of all history, and believe nothing, but what we see with our own eyes.—I proceed to observe,

III. Though the evangelists have not written every thing which Christ did and taught, yet, they have written as much as is necessary to the establishment of our faith. Saint John says, *Many other things truly did Jesus, which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe.* He says afterward, *There are many other things which Jesus did, which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.* A particular narrative of every thing which Christ did and spake, would have swelled the sacred

volume

volume beyond bounds. Few or none would have found ability to procure it, or time to read it. So that it would have been much leſs uſeful to the world, than the conciſe, ſummary account which is now given us. They who can reject the goſpel, after all the evidence which ariſes from the miracles written, might as well reject it, if the number were ten times as great. And though every *diſcourſe* which our Saviour delivered is not given us at full length, yet we have a ſummary view of all the *doctrines* which he taught. Though many things which he ſpake are omitted in the hiſtory, yet no eſſential and important truth is ſuppreſſed.

The obſervation here made, may be applied to the works and ſermons of his apoſtles. It is not neceſſary to ſuppoſe, nor indeed is it probable, that the New Teſtament contains all their tranſactions. It is certain that we have only a ſummary account of the ſermons which they preached; and, in ſome inſtances, there is only mention made of their preaching at ſuch a place, without any particular detail of the matters on which they ſpake. Nor is the ſuppoſition unreaſonable, that they might write many epiſtles, on one occaſion and another, which, are not tranſmitted to us. But then we have, in the ſacred volume, all the *doctrines* fully taught, which we could have had, if every ſermon preached, and every letter written by the apoſtles, had been given us at full length. As they wrote to different

ferent churches, they would undoubtedly write many of the ſame things repeatedly. We find this to be in ſome meaſure the caſe with many of the epiſtles which we have. There is a great ſimilarity between that to the Epheſians, and that to the Coloſſians. There is almoſt no ſentiment in the one, but what occurs in the other, and often in nearly the ſame expreſſions. The epiſtle to Titus contains little, but what we find in thoſe to Timothy. There is a great reſemblance between Jude's epiſtle, and part of the ſecond epiſtle of Peter.

A repetition of the ſame things, eſpecially of the more important truths and duties of religion, is of great uſe. It helps us to a better underſtanding of them; it tends to impreſs them on the mind; it ſerves to fix them in the memory; it ſhews what the inſpired writers eſteemed the moſt weighty matters, and were moſt ſolicitous to inculcate. It is attended alſo with another important advantage. It ſecures the ſcriptures from the poſſibility of material corruption. If the religion of the goſpel had been written ſyſtematically; and the ſame doctrine, or precept, had been only once expreſſed; evil minded men, by altering a ſingle paſſage, would have eraſed an eſſential point, and changed the ſubſtance of the ſyſtem. But now, as the ſame things are interſperſed in various parts, the corruption of a ſingle text, will affect none of the great truths of religion, becauſe the truth contained in the text

ſo

ſo corrupted, is to be found elſewhere. In order to blot out any of the doctrines of religion, the ſcriptures muſt be altered in ſo many places at once, that every reader would immediately obſerve and reject the corruption. From this one circumſtance, we may be abſolutely certain, that the ſacred ſcriptures have never ſuffered any material or eſſential alterations, either from the careleſſneſs of tranſcribers, or the artifice of impoſtors.

But though it ſeems neceſſary, that there ſhould be frequent repetitions of the ſame things, yet it is by no means neceſſary, that every thing which Chriſt did and ſpake, or which the apoſtles preached and wrote, ſhould be conveyed to us; for ſo many things could not be contained within the compaſs of a volume adapted to common uſe.

From the miracles recorded, we have all the evidence of the divine authority of the ſcriptures, which we could have from a thouſand more. And from the writings tranſmitted to us, we have all the inſtructions concerning our faith and duty, that we ſhould have had, if every ſermon delivered by Chriſt and his apoſtles, and all the letters which the apoſtles wrote, had been conveyed to us at large. For as the ſermons were delivered, and the letters were written to different perſons, at different times, they were doubtleſs in ſubſtance ſimilar to thoſe which we now poſſeſs: So that the ſcriptures are perfect, and

fully

fully adapted to their end, though, in the days of inſpiration and miracles, many things were ſpoken and done, which are not contained in this book.

What was the great end for which the ſcriptures were written, the apoſtle teaches us ;

IV. In the fourth place. *Theſe things are written that ye might believe.*

Faith is the great principle of religion. The ſcriptures teach us, what is that evidence on which their divine authority is founded, and point out to us the great truths which are to govern our practice.

The Chriſtian needs to go no farther, than to the Bible itſelf, to find evidence of its divinity. If we only receive it with the regard due to common hiſtory, we muſt believe, that there were ſuch perſons as Jeſus and his apoſtles, and that they performed very wonderful works. If they performed ſuch works, they were ſent of God ; and if they were ſent of God, the doctrines which they taught are to be believed ; and the rules of life, which they gave, are to be obeyed. The purity, harmony, benevolent deſign and uſeful tendency of theſe doctrines and precepts, afford additional evidence for the confirmation of our faith.

The faith of a Chriſtian muſt not ſtop in a rational conviction of the divine authority of the ſcriptures ; nor in a juſt apprehenſion of the ſenſe and meaning of them. It muſt go farther.

It

It muſt regard the ſyſtem of religion there taught, as excellent and important; and yield a full and unreſerved conſent to it. That only is true faith, which has a practical influence. The apoſtle ſays to the Theſſalonians, "The word, which ye heard of us, ye received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in you which believe." He commends them "for their work of faith and their labour of love." That is faith, which gives the doctrines of the goſpel their proper operation on the heart and life. If we acknowledge the goſpel to be true, on a rational conviction of the ſufficiency of its evidence, and yet treat it as if it were falſe; if we own Chriſt as a Saviour, and yet make no application to him, and place no dependence on him for ſalvation; if we profeſs the doctrines which he has taught, and yet are wholly uninfluenced by them in our conduct; if we commend his precepts as excellent, and yet live in oppoſition to them; our faith is only ſpeculation, and our ſpeculative faith is practical unbelief. But if we ſo receive the goſpel, that it effectually works in us, caſts down imaginations, and every high thing which exalts itſelf againſt the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Chriſt; then our faith is ſuch as the goſpel requires.

If the goſpel is true, it muſt be infinitely important. To receive it with indifference, is to

treat

treat it with contempt. To despise it is to expose ourselves to that wonderful destruction, which it reveals from heaven against them who hold the truth in unrighteousness. If to disbelieve the gospel against all the evidence which attends it, discovers perverseness of heart; what stupidity, what obstinacy, what madness do they discover, who profess to believe it, and yet live in direct opposition to it!

It is only the influential, the practical faith, which is worthy of the name.

This brings us to observe,

V. That to this faith is annexed eternal life, "These things are written, that ye might believe, and that believing ye might have life through Christ's name."

The gospel considers mankind as a guilty race, under condemnation to everlasting death. To redeem them from death, and bring them to the hope of immortality here, and the enjoyment of it hereafter, was the great end for which Christ appeared on earth. To accomplish this design, he not only lived among men, wrought miracles, and went about teaching, and doing good; but suffered death, revived, and entered into glory. Eternal life, therefore, comes to us in his name; and our faith and hope must regard him in the character of a saviour and redeemer. If we have life through his name, our faith must be in his name. The apostle Peter says, "We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, who

was

was ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifeſted in theſe laſt times for us, who by him do believe in God that raiſed him from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

Faith entitles us to eternal life. "Believing, we have life through his name." But the faith to which this mighty privilege is annexed, is ſuch as we have already deſcribed; a faith which effectually works in us. To no other faith do we find the promiſe of life made. To know, therefore, whether we have life through the name of Chriſt, we muſt inquire, whether we have purified our hearts by obeying the truth; whether the ſpirit and temper of the goſpel is formed in us; whether we are created in Chriſt Jeſus to good works, which God has ordained that we ſhould walk in them.

IMPROVEMENT.

HOW wonderful is the grace of God, in making ſuch preparation for our faith and happineſs! A Saviour has been ſent from heaven—the moſt ſtupendous miracles have been wrought—the moſt ſublime and glorious doctrines have been delivered—theſe have been written—the writings have been preſerved and conveyed to us, that we might believe, and that believing, we might have eternal life. How great is the perverſeneſs of men, that they ſhould need ſuch mighty efforts of divine power to bring them to believe

How

How amazing is the perverſeneſs of thoſe who remain in unbelief and diſobedience againſt all theſe efforts of God's grace and power !—How juſt will be the condemnation of thoſe, who will not, by all the means uſed with them, and by all the advantages beſtowed on them, be brought to believe in Chriſt's name, and accept the glorious life, which he has purchaſed for them, and revealed to them ! It is ſaid of ſome, that Chriſt himſelf marvelled becauſe of their unbelief. And marvellous it is, that ſinners ſhould need ſo much done for them to overcome their unbelief and enmity ; and that ſo many ſhould continue unbelieving and impenitent after all that is done.

God has written to us the great things of his grace ; he has ſent to us the word of ſalvation. Let us beware, leſt this be our condemnation; that life is offered us, and we have choſen death; and light has come to us, and we have loved darkneſs.

END OF THE TWENTYSIXTH SERMON.

SERMON XXVII.

The Credibility and Importance of the Gospel Report.

ISAIAH liii. 1.

¿ Who hath believed our report ?

THIS chapter contains a prophetick deſcription of the ſufferings of Jeſus Chriſt—of the gracious purpoſes of his death—and of the contempt and oppoſition which ſhould attend him in the courſe of his miniſtry.

The words of our text are a complaint of the incredulity of thoſe, to whom his goſpel ſhould be preached by himſelf in his own perſon, and by his apoſtles after him.

The words are by ſaint John applied to thoſe, who, when they ſaw Chriſt's miracles, would not receive him as the promiſed Saviour. "Though he had done ſo many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him; that the ſaying of Eſaias the prophet might be fulfilled, Lord, ¿Who hath believed our report ?—And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed ?" The

apoſtle Paul, ſpeaking of the perverſeneſs of the Jews under *his* preaching, and that of the other apoſtles, ſays, in the words of Iſaiah, "How beautiful are the feet of them, who preach the goſpel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the goſpel; for the ſame prophet ſays, Lord, ¿ Who hath believed our report?"

The report here intended is the goſpel. The complaint is, that few believe it. And this complaint is made by thoſe, who preached in the moſt engaging manner, and with the higheſt tokens of their divine commiſſion.

The text is not a lamentation over thoſe who had never heard the goſpel, but a reprehenſion of thoſe who had heard, and yet would not believe. The prophet ſpeaking of the Meſſiah, whom he calls God's ſervant, ſays, "He ſhall deal prudently—he ſhall ſprinkle many nations—that which had not been told them, they ſhall ſee; and that which they had not heard, ſhall they conſider." But he adds, "¿ Who hath believed our report?" John applies the prophecy as fulfilled in thoſe who had actually ſeen Chriſt's miracles. Paul, in like manner, applies it to thoſe, who had ſeen the feet of the meſſengers, who brought glad tidings.

We will contemplate the goſpel under this idea, that is, a *Report*. And then we will conſider the complaint: *¿ Who hath believed it?*

I. We

I. We will contemplate this report, and inquire whether it is not worthy of our attention and belief.

1. The report, which we hear, is a moſt *inſtructive* report.

It brings us information of many things, which were before unknown, and which, without this information, never could have been known to the ſons of men. "That which had not been told us, we ſee." The goſpel, for this reaſon, is called a meſſage, good tidings, and tidings of great joy.

The leading truths of natural religion, as the exiſtence and providence of God, the immortality of the ſoul, and the obligations to virtue, are agreeable to the dictates of reaſon; and perhaps might be, in ſome meaſure, diſcovered without revelation. At leaſt they were known among thoſe, who had never enjoyed a *written* revelation, though, indeed, we cannot ſay, how far theſe might be indebted to traditional information. But certainly thoſe truths, which immediately relate to the recovery and ſalvation of ſinners, human reaſon could never inveſtigate. Whether the guilty can be pardoned—or, if there is pardon for them, in what way it will be granted, and on what terms it may be obtained—whether they may hope for God's aſſiſtance in complying with theſe terms—whether forgiveneſs will be repeated after new offences—whether there will be a reſurrection of the body—and what is the nature of the life to come? There are

queſtions to which reaſon can return no ſatisfactory anſwer. Our knowledge in theſe intereſting matters comes by the report of the goſpel. And theſe are ſome of its principal ſubjects.

This leads me to ſay,

2. The goſpel is a report *from heaven.*

Jeſus the ſon of God, and his inſpired apoſtles, call it *their* report.

We often hear rumours, of one kind and another, of which we know not the original. Their ſound, like that of the winds, ſtrikes our ears, but we know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes. If we attempt to trace them, we cannot find the author or occaſion. Before we have gone far, they appear to be ſubſtantially changed. And yet theſe precarious reports meet with many who will readily believe them, eagerly take them up, and induſtriouſly hand them round.

The report, which we have heard, is not like theſe. We know whence it is. It originated in heaven, and from thence is ſent down to us. The apoſtle commends the Theſſalonians, that when they heard the goſpel preached, "they received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." He warns the Hebrews, that they refuſe not him, who ſpeaketh; for, ſays he, "if they eſcaped not, who refuſed him that ſpoke on earth, much more ſhall not we eſcape, if we turn away from him, that ſpeaketh from heaven."—"How ſhall we eſcape, if

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we neglect this great salvation, which, at the first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by them who heard him?"

The gospel was, in some degree, made known to the patriarchs; and afterwards more fully to the prophets. But "God, who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to the fathers by the prophets, has, in these last days, spoken to us by his son." The knowledge communicated to the fathers was from heaven; for "holy men of God spake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But the gospel revelation is, in a more eminent sense, from heaven, as it was spoken to men immediately by the mouth of a divine instructor. And his instructions have come to us, not as most other reports come, by uncertain traditionary conveyance from one to another; but in a way far more sure and satisfactory—by authentick records. This divine teacher chose a number of disciples, who attended upon him, during his abode on earth, and received his doctrines immediately from his mouth. These doctrines they, in his name, preached to the world, for the benefit of that age; and committed to writing, for the use of succeeding ages. The report comes to us, not as a doubtful hearsay, but as a faithful record.

Whatever evidence we might have, that the Son of God once appeared on earth, yet if we had no information concerning his doctrines, but what came by traditionary report, we must receive it with great diffidence; for, in passing

through a ſucceſſion of many generations, it might be materially altered. Tradition, in the early ages of the world, when human life was extended to almoſt a thouſand years, was a much ſafer mode of conveyance, than it can be now, ſince the great reduction of our mortal term. The great doctrines of revelation are not left in the precarious hands of tradition. Soon after Chriſt's aſcenſion, they were, by his attendants, committed to writing. And copies of their writings were, in a ſhort time, ſo multiplied and diſperſed, as to ſtand ſecure againſt any attempts to corrupt them. Had the ſacred records been altered, while the writers were alive, they would have detected and remedied the evil. By the time that they were gone off the ſtage, the copies were too numerous to admit of an alteration, which ſhould be common to them all. If only a few copies had been mutilated and corrupted, theſe, by comparing them with other copies, might have been corrected. To introduce into them all, at the ſame time, any great and eſſential alterations, muſt have been ſo evidently impracticable, that we cannot ſuppoſe it would ever be attempted. If then the goſpel was, at firſt, a report from heaven, we are ſtill to regard it as ſuch; for it has been conveyed to us in a way which ſecures it from all reaſonable ſuſpicion of eſſential corruption.

We may therefore add,

3. The goſpel is a *credible* report.

Many

Many reports come to us without evidence. we only hear them ; but know not what is their foundation, or whether they have any. And yet even theſe reports paſs not wholly unregarded. How readily do we give credit and circulation to ill reports concerning our neighbours ?—How eaſily are we alarmed at threatening reports concerning our perſons and properties ?—How fondly do we embrace favourable reports concerning our particular friends ? Such rumours as theſe we often believe, without waiting to examine their evidence or credibility. But if any important intelligence is brought to us, which is both rational in itſelf, and, at the ſame time, ſupported by a competent number of reputable witneſſes, we may much rather judge it worthy of our attention and belief.

With this evidence the goſpel comes.

It is credible in its own nature. It gives us the moſt noble and exalted ideas of the perfections and providence of God. It lays before us a ſyſtem of moral duties fully correſponding with the divine character. That we ſhould love God with all our hearts, and our neighbours as ourſelves—that we ſhould relieve the miſeries, and promote the happineſs of others, as we have opportunity—that we ſhould govern our paſſions and reſtrain our appetites—that we ſhould uſe the good things of the world without abuſing them, are duties which the goſpel inculcates and reaſon approves.

The doctrines of the gospel, though beyond the discovery, and above the comprehension of reason, are, in no instance, contrary to its dictates. They are all adapted to promote real virtue and righteousness. The immortality of the soul; the resurrection of the body, a future judgment, and the equitable distribution of rewards and punishments, are motives of solemn importance, urging us to repentance of sin, and holiness of life. The discovery of God's mercy to forgive the penitent, and of his grace to assist the humble, is adapted to raise our drooping hopes, and animate us against all the difficulties, which may attend us in a course of religion. The benevolent design, and holy tendency of the gospel, in all its doctrines and precepts, render it worthy of our belief and acceptance.

Besides this internal evidence, God has been pleased to give it the sanction of his own testimony.

The miracles, which Jesus performed, were, to his first disciples, a complete demonstration of the truth of his doctrines. The history of his life, miracles, death and resurrection, delivered on the testimony of these disciples, is to us a sufficient evidence of the same. For, as they conversed with him, and saw and heard the things which they relate, they could not themselves be deceived. The innocence and integrity of their lives, and their selfdenials and sufferings in their master's cause, secure them from the suspicion

picion of a design to deceive others. The numerous adversaries to the Christian cause among the learned men and rulers of the Jews and Gentiles, rendered it impossible, that these disciples, had they been ever so crafty and dishoneſt, should impose a fraud on the world. They confirmed their testimony and doctrines by miracles performed in their master's name. They appeared to live and act under the influence of their own doctrines; and thus gave practical evidence of their sincerity in preaching them. They resigned every worldly interest in support of the sacred cause, in which they were engaged; and thus made it manifest to all, that the motives which governed them were not the interests and honours of this world; but a belief of, and regard to that solemn futurity, which they, with such confidence, proclaimed to mankind.

In consequence of their preaching, the gospel gained footing, and spread to a great extent in the world; which it never could have done, if the facts alleged by them, had been only fictions of their own heads. If there never had been such a man as Jesus of Nazareth, who publickly preached, and wrought miracles in Judea; who was tried and condemned by the Jewish council, and sentenced to crucifixion by the Roman governor, and who, within three days after his death and burial, rose again and appeared to many; a few men, combined together, could never, by any artifice or contrivance, have persuaded the world

world to believe theſe things; becauſe the contrary muſt have been univerſally known. That chriſtianity did gain credit, and ſpread in the world, and has, for ſeveral ages continued, even down to this time, we all know. This fact is an undeniable evidence of its truth and divinity. For it did not take place and prevail, either by ſecret fraud or open force, as impoſtures uſually have done; but by the teſtimony of a few men to plain matters of fact, to which they appeal as well known, and which, had they not been real, could eaſily have been diſproved.

Errors have ſometimes been introduced and propagated by the artful reaſoning of intereſted men. But chriſtianity reſts not on the baſis of human reaſoning, or a ſubtile, intricate train of argumentation: It ſtands on the ground of plain facts, of which every man is able to judge. The life, miracles, death and reſurrection of Jeſus of Nazareth are the facts which ſupport it. If theſe did really take place, the goſpel is true. Whether they did or not, men of common abilities were as competent to judge, as men of the profoundeſt learning.

We, who live in the preſent age, have not, in every reſpect, the ſame evidence of the truth of the goſpel, as they had, who were eye witneſſes of thoſe facts. But we have their teſtimony, in the moſt authentick manner, conveyed to us. Some advantages we have, which they had not.

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We have the examination of preceding ages. We ſee chriſtianity ſtill ſupporting itſelf againſt all the oppoſition of the world. We ſee the unwearied attempts of its enemies to ſubvert it, rendered fruitleſs and vain. We ſee many of the predictions, contained in theſe records, already verified; and others, to all appearance, haſtening on toward an accompliſhment. Theſe things amount to a full proof that the goſpel is divine. We are to regard it then as a credible report.

4. It is an *intereſting* report.

Thoſe reports, which, in our ſocial interviews, are the more uſual topics of diſcourſe, are, in compariſon with this, of ſmall importance. Some of them relate to peace and war; the ſucceſs and defeat of armies; the policies of kingdoms; and the progreſs of arts and commerce. Some of them reſpect the affairs of families; the conduct of particular perſons; contentions and lawſuits between neighbours; the folly of one man, and the wiſdom of another. Many of them are altogether trifling, and introduced to ſupply the want of thought, and fill up the vacuities of converſation. But the report, which we have from heaven, is infinitely important and equally concerns every ſon of Adam. If other reports engage the attention of ſome, this demands the regard of all.

From the goſpel we learn, that the human race have, by tranſgreſſion, fallen under the di-

vine

vine diſpleaſure. This report correſponds with our own experience and obſervation. We ſee death reigning over the ſons of men. That death entered into the world by ſin, is a reaſonable ſuppoſition; and it is an expreſs doctrine of revelation. Death is not all that the ſinner has to fear. Conſcience apprehends ſomething more awful than this; and the wrath of God is revealed from heaven againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men. Theſe are alarming reports. Whether there be any remedy for our unhappy condition; how we ſhall obtain deliverance from the wrath to come, are ſerious and important inquiries.

The goſpel brings us a joyful meſſage. It proclaims peace and good will to men. It diſcovers a ſacrifice offered for our ſins by Jeſus the Son of God, who was manifeſted in human fleſh. It aſſures us that God is in Chriſt, reconciling the world to himſelf, not imputing their treſpaſſes. Pardon here, and glory in heaven, it promiſes without diſtinction, to all who repent, and do works meet for repentance.

¿ How intereſting are theſe reports? Our exiſtence here is ſhort. All our worldly poſſeſſions and proſpects we muſt ſoon reſign. ¿ Shall we have nothing in exchange? To think that our exiſtence terminates with death, is ſhocking to nature. To look for a miſerable exiſtence beyond death is more tremendous ſtill. How

joyful

joyful then is the information, that there is before us an exiſtence, which, will be laſting without end, and may alſo be happy beyond conception—that the moſt guilty may be pardoned, and the moſt unworthy may obtain a bleſſed immortality.

In other caſes, we readily receive a report which favours our intereſt, and correſponds with our wiſhes. We eaſily believe an ill report of an enemy, or a good report of a friend. We eagerly attend to advice which agrees with our previous reſolutions; and we, with little ſuſpicion embrace, as our friend, the man who promiſes to ſerve our intereſt. The goſpel report is then moſt worthy of our acceptance. This ſhews us how we may be great and happy! It points out to us our real intereſt, and inſtructs us how we may ſecure it.

5. This is a *publick* report. It is what we have all heard, and heard often.

Some reports are cautiouſly whiſpered from one friend and confidant to another. However intereſting they may be, there are many, who have no opportunity to take the benefit of them. If there is a report of great profits to be made by a particular article of commerce—of a great demand for ſome of the neceſſaries of life in a certain place—of a great ſcarcity of ſome uſeful commodity likely to happen ſoon; they who firſt hear this report, will keep it to themſelves; or communi-

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cate it only to a few ſelect friends, who may aſſiſt them in the monopoly.

But the report, of which we are now ſpeaking, is common. All have the ſame opportunity to make uſe of it. None can ſay, they have never heard it. "The ſound has gone forth into all the earth;" as the apoſtle obſerves; "and the word to the ends of the world."

If we fail of thoſe bleſſings, which the goſpel offers, we cannot plead in our excuſe, that the report of them never had reached us; or that others had firſt engroſſed them. They are publiſhed and propoſed to all. How many ſoever have obtained a ſhare in them, enough ſtill remains for us. The report is, "Ho! every one that thirſteth, come to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."—"Whoſoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

Finally, this is an *ancient* report. It was made ages ago. Our fathers heard it, and have told it to us: We heard it in our childhood; and hear it ſtill. It is often repeated in our ears, and importunately urged on our conſciences. If we deſpiſe it, ſoon will be verified that part, which we are moſt reluctant to hear; "He who believeth not, ſhall not ſee life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

"Men and brethren, and whoſoever among you feareth God, unto you, unto you is the word

word of this ſalvation ſent."——Through Jeſus Chriſt is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins: And by him all who believe are juſtified from all things from which ye cannot be juſtified by the law of nature, nor could the Jews be juſtified by the law of Moſes. Beware therefore leſt that come upon you, which is ſpoken of in the prophets, "Behold, ye deſpiſers, and wonder and periſh." For ſaith the Almighty, "I work a work in your days, a work which ye will in no wiſe believe, though a man declare it to you."

The guilt and danger of unbelief will be more fully repreſented in another diſcourſe.

END OF THE TWENTYSEVENTH SERMON.

SERMON XXVIII.

The Guilt and Danger of Unbelief.

ISAIAH liii. 1.

¿ Who hath believed our Report ?

THESE words are a prophetick complaint of the incredulity and disobedience of those, to whom the gospel should be preached by Jesus in person, and by his disciples after him.

We have already considered, what kind of report the gospel is.—We have seen, that, in every view, it is worthy of our most serious regard.

Let us now,

II. Consider, whether a proper attention is paid to this report among those to whom it is sent, or who have an opportunity to hear it.

The complaint in the text is, " ¿ Who hath believed our report ?"

The prophet speaks in the person of Jesus Christ, and his apostles. He fortells, that under

der their miniſtry, there would be many unbelievers: And ſo the event has proved.

As it was in their day, ſo it has been ſince. The goſpel, which to ſome is a ſavour of life unto life, is to others a ſavour of death unto death.

There are many *nations*, which have not believed the report.

The words of the Pſalmiſt, concerning the works of nature, Saint Paul applies to the preachers of the goſpel.—"Their ſound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. There is no ſpeech nor language, where their voice is not heard."

The commiſſion which Chriſt gave to his apoſtles was, that they ſhould preach the goſpel *to all nations*. This commiſſion they executed with fidelity. They travelled into various parts of the world. Many nations they perſonally viſited. Wherever they went, they preached in places of publick reſort. And where they found a competent number of believers, they planted churches; and in every church they ordained ſtated elders. To the churches which they had planted they wrote many letters, which were publickly read, as well in other churches as in thoſe to which they were immediately directed. They performed miracles in the preſence of multitudes, and in the moſt conſpicuous manner. The doors of the houſes, in which they preached, were opened to all, to heathens and unbelievers, as well as to chriſtians. And they, as occaſion

required, ſpake in all the various languages of the people who aſſembled to hear them. They might therefore properly be ſaid to preach the goſpel to *all nations*. Many, from all the nations comprehended within the Roman empire, heard their doctrines and ſaw their miracles; and theſe would naturally carry to others information of the things which they had ſeen and heard. Probably there were few or none within the empire, but who, in the apoſtles's time, either heard the goſpel, or heard ſuch report concerning it, as ought to have awakened their attention to it. The intercourſe of the Romans with other nations could not fail to convey the report beyond the bounds of the empire. Nor was the miniſtry of the apoſtles, and the primitive preachers confined within theſe limits. Their labours occupied a larger ſphere. The work which they began, was, in the next age, ſtill purſued, and carried to a wider extent. In ſhort, it may be doubted, whether there is any nation in the world, which has not at one time or another had the offer of the goſpel. If it has not been actually preached among them, yet the knowledge of it has been conveyed to them in ſuch a meaſure, as might juſtly have led them to enquire into its nature and evidence. The true reaſon why they have it not, is their indifference to it when they hear it, and their rejection of it when it is offered.

If there were, among mankind, the ſame attention to the concerns of religion, as there is to

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the intereſt of the preſent world, the goſpel, before this time, would have overſpread the earth. The valuable arts and manufactures of one country are ſoon introduced into all commercial countries, and from thence conveyed to places more obſcure. The produce and works of China and the Indies are circulated through Europe, and all the civilized parts of America: And many of them are not unknown even among the ſavages of America, and the barbarians of Africa. If a uſeful or curious diſcovery is made in one nation, it ſoon is communicated to others. The uſe of the loadſtone and the compaſs, of gunpowder and fire arms did not long reſt with the firſt inventors. If mankind felt the ſame ſolicitude to improve in virtue and goodneſs, as to increaſe in wealth and power—the ſame concern to ſpread the knowledge of religion, as to promote arts, manufactures and commerce, chriſtianity had long ſince been the religion of the world. But ſuch is their ſtupidity with regard to their moſt important intereſts, that it is ſtill confined to much the ſmaller part of our fallen race.

Among thoſe, to whom the goſpel is preached, there are many, who avowedly reject it; and of thoſe who profeſs to believe it, there are many, who in works deny it.

The oppoſition of the heart to the practical deſign of the goſpel, is conſidered as unbelief. The apoſtle ſays of the Jews, "They have not

all *obeyed* the gospel, for Esaias saith, ¿ Who hath *believed* our report?

The gospel is not a dry system of speculative opinions, designed for our amusement, but a wise collection of doctrines and precepts, intended for the government of our lives. And the faith, which it requires is not merely an act of the understanding in assenting to it as true, but an exercise also of the will in embracing it as good. It is believing with the heart, and receiving the love of the truth. He, who does not in heart receive, and in practice obey, the truth, is guilty of unbelief. His faith, in divine estimation, is of no value, because it has no influence, and produces no effect. The apostle commends the faith of those, "who when they heard the word, received it as the word of God, which effectually works in them that believe." As he says of circumcision, we may say also of faith—It verily profiteth, if we obey the gospel; but if not, it then becomes unbelief. Of the wicked servant who smites his fellows, and drinks with the drunken, our Lord says, "His portion shall be appointed to him with *unbelievers*." His vicious life ranks him with infidels. Elsewhere it is said, "His portion shall be with *hypocrites*," with those, who, in practice contradict what, in words, they profess to believe.

The Jews, who rebelled against God in the wilderness, were destroyed by various judgments, because of their unbelief. They saw the mighty works

works, which God wrought for their ſalvation; but they ſinned againſt him, tempted him in their hearts, and provoked him by their diſobedience; and therefore it is ſaid, "They *believed not* in God, nor *truſted* in his ſalvation."

We wonder, perhaps, at thoſe, who heard the goſpel from the mouth of Jeſus and his apoſtles, and yet treated it as a fiction and impoſture. It is ſaid, that Jeſus himſelf marvelled, becauſe of their unbelief.

They, however, are not the only unbelievers. The goſpel, which Chriſt and his apoſtles preached, is tranſmitted to our age.—¿ Have we received it? It cannot be ſaid, we have *all* obeyed it. There are many who live in the allowed practice of the ſins, which this manifeſtly condemns. They are unjuſt and oppreſſive to their neighbours; vain and impious in their language; wild and extravagant in their diverſions; intemperate and irregular in their indulgences. ¿ Do they believe the report, that becauſe of theſe things the wrath of God is coming on the children of diſobedience?

Many are under a ſpirit of ſlumber. They have eyes, but ſee not, ears have they, but they hear not, neither do they underſtand. They feel no ſolicitude about their eternal ſalvation; no concern to underſtand the terms of it, or to aſcertain their intereſt in it. They do not even profeſs the goſpel, or attend with conſtancy on its inſtitutions. ¿ Do they believe that there is

before them an eternal ſtate of retribution ?—¿ Do they believe that by the law of God they are condemned already, and that only the divine patience ſuſpends the execution of the ſentence which is gone forth againſt them ?—¿ Do they believe that Jeſus the Son of God came down from heaven to call them to repentance, and that on this repentance their eternal happineſs depends ?—¿ What ? believe theſe things, and yet neglect the means of their ſalvation ? neglect prayer, ſelfexamination—and attendance on divine worſhip ? What inconſiſtency is here !

There are ſome who attend on the external forms of religion, and yet practically renounce it. They come before God as his people, and hear his words ; but they will not do them. The intereſts of the world are ſupreme in their thoughts. They are cumbered about theſe things ; but the one thing, which is needful, finds no place in their hearts. They have been warned that many, like them, will ſtand before the Judge at the laſt day, and plead, " Lord, Lord, we have eaten and drunk in thy preſence, and thou haſt taught in our ſtreets ; but he will ſay, I know you not ; depart from me ye workers of iniquity." ¿ Do they believe this report ?

There are ſome, who pay little regard to the power of Godlineſs. They believe, in general that there is ſuch a thing as religion ; but have very partial and ſuperficial conceptions of it. They keep, or *ſeem* to keep ſome of the commandments.

mandments. They cannot be charged with any of the groſs violations of the rules of godlineſs, ſobriety, truth and righteouſneſs; and they hope they ſhall ſtand approved. ¿ Do they believe that God looks on the heart, and requires truth in the inward parts?—¿ Do they believe that love to God, faith in the Mediator, and benevolence to mankind are eſſential to religion?—¿ Do not doctrines of this kind ſeem like idle reports?

If, beſides ſpeculative infidels, all who careleſsly neglect divine ordinances—all who are ignorant of, and uninfluenced by divine truths—all who live unconcerned about, and inattentive to their eternal ſalvation—all who regard the intereſts of the world in preference to heaven and future happineſs—if all theſe are found in the liſt of unbelievers, may not the old complaint be renewed, "¿ Who hath believed our report?

If the report, which is ſent among us, is ſo important and intereſting, ſo rational and credible, as has been repreſented, ¿Whence is it, that ſo many diſregard it? ¿ Is it becauſe they have not capacity to underſtand its deſign, or to examine its evidence? They have reaſon ſufficient for their worldly purpoſes. They are wiſe for their temporal intereſt. But there is in them an evil heart of unbelief. Our Saviour ſays, "This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, but they have loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil; for every one, that

doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved."

By way of improvement then,

1. Let us reflect on the great guilt of unbelievers in a goſpel land, and the awful condemnation, to which they ſtand expoſed.

When we view, with ſerious attention, the plan of the goſpel, it appears to be perfectly adapted to our real neceſſities, and fully to correſpond with our reaſonable wiſhes. Herein God has abounded to us in all wiſdom and prudence. Here is a ſure foundation laid to ſupport our hope —clear and complete evidence given to gain our faith—the moſt powerful arguments uſed to command our conſent—and the moſt ſuitable aſſiſtances offered to animate our reſolution. They who periſh under theſe advantages, muſt impute to themſelves their own deſtruction.

If ſin by the commandment becomes exceedingly ſinful, by the goſpel it becomes exceedingly more ſo. If they who deſpiſed the law of Moſes, died without mercy, how ſevere will be the puniſhment of thoſe who trample on the grace of Chriſt. We lament the unhappy condition of the heathens, who have not heard the report of the goſpel: ¿ But how much more deplorable will be the condition of thoſe who have heard, and will not believe? We are they to whom this report has come. It will not paſs by us with indifference, and leave us as it found us. If we will not receive it, or will not be influenced

ed by it; if we reject it, as if it were not true, or disregard it, as if it were not important, it will, beyond all conception, aggravate our present guilt, and augment our future punishment. The time is just at hand, when mortals will know what is the issue and result of the gospel with respect to them. It will be a savour of life, or of death. O, hear, that your souls may live. Know in this your day, the things which belong to your peace, before they are hidden from your eyes.

2. If there are many who hear the report of the gospel, and yet believe it not, each one should be solicitous for himself.

We are warned that many will be lost. Let us not be high minded, but fear. "Enter in at the strait gate," says our Lord, "for wide is the gate and broad is the way, which leads to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there are who find it." The apostle to the Hebrews urges the same argument. God pronounced concerning the generation which came out of Egypt, that, because of their unbelief, they should not enter into his rest. "Let us therefore fear," says the apostle, "lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it."

When Christ said to his disciples, "One of you shall betray me;" struck with a general astonishment,

aſtoniſhment, they felt a ſolemn anxiety, each one for himſelf, They ſaid to him, one and all, "¿ Lord, is it I ?"—"¿ Lord, is it I ?"—Even Judas joined in the enquiry. It was a juſt concern. ¿ How much greater reaſon have we to be ſolicitous for ourſelves, when we are often warned, that, of the many who are called, few are choſen ?

We believe, in general, that many will periſh from among thoſe who enjoy the goſpel. We allow that their doom will be awful. But we flatter ourſelves, that we ſhall eſcape it. Let us enquire, what is the ground of our hope.

¿ Do we think, that the temper of the goſpel is formed in us, and that our title to heaven is already ſecured ? Happy indeed are we, if this is our ſtate and character. But in a matter of ſuch conſequence, let us proceed cautiouſly and hope humbly. Peter, when his Lord aſked him, "¿ Loveſt thou me ?" anſwered boldly "Yea, Lord, thou knoweſt that I love thee." But Jeſus renewed the queſtion; and, on receiving the ſame anſwer, repeated the queſtion again. He has taught us, that we ſhould not be too haſty in our concluſions, or too confident in our hopes. The goſpel inſtructs us, that we muſt examine ourſelves, whether we are in the faith—that we muſt prove our own ſelves—that we muſt give diligence to the full aſſurance of hope to the end.

Let

Let us examine the foundation of our hope. ¿ Does it reſt wholly on the gracious promiſe of God in Jeſus Chriſt ? If our hope leans on any other ſupport, it muſt fall. Guilty creatures have no ground but this, on which they can ſtand.

Let us examine whether we have complied with the terms of the promiſe. ¿ Have we been careful to underſtand them ? ¿ Do we feel our hearts conſenting to them ? ¿ Do we find that hatred of ſin ; that tenderneſs of conſcience ; that watchfulneſs againſt temptations ; that delight in duty ; and that ſteady concern to approve ourſelves to God, which are the fruits of goſpel faith and repentance ?

Let us examine, what is the influence of our hope. A falſe hope makes men ſecure and careleſs ; bold and preſumptuous. A true hope will make them watchful and humble, attentive to themſelves, and charitable to others. Every one who has this hope, purifies himſelf.

Let us examine, whether we make improvements in religion. The vain hypocrite glories in his preſent attainments. The humble chriſtian aſpires after perfection.

It is probable there may be ſome, who will not even pretend to an evidence of their *preſent* title to ſalvation. They hope however, that they ſhall obtain it by a *future* compliance with its terms.

¿ But can you live contented and eaſy in ſuch a ſtate as this ? ¿ Do you not think, that many have

have perished in their sins, who had as strong resolutions, as you have, of future repentance? ¿ Do you imagine, that every one, who *intended* to seek salvation, has actually so sought as to obtain? If not, then perhaps *your* intentions will fail you.

¿ Do you expect peculiar favour, because you have taken more pains in religion than some others; or have not sinned so grosly as they? Doubtless you will have full credit for all the good you have done; and you will not be punished for sins, which you never committed in act, or indulged in heart.

But whether you are greater sinners or smaller, is not the present question. If you are under the power of sin, you are under condemnation. And, whatever pains you have taken in some particular matters, if you have not fully consented to the terms of salvation, it is none of yours.

When you see some gros sinners proceeding, with apparent unconcern in their guilty course, you wonder, that they are not alarmed at the danger, which so evidently threatens them.—¿ But, why have not you as much cause to be alarmed as they? ¿ Are not you also exposed to condemnation? ¿ Can you be saved without repentance? ¿ Must not repentance, in its general nature, be the same thing in you as in them? ¿ How then can you feel secure, while you think them in danger?

¿ Is

¿ Is it not probable, that there may be, in the place of punishment, some, whose guilt was not so aggravated as yours ?—some, who never sinned against equal light, warnings and restraints ? —Some, who never abused so much grace, nor wearied so long patience ?—Yea, is it not supposeable, that, in the world of misery, there may be those, who have taken as great pains, employed as many thoughts, and spent as much time, in the concerns of their souls, as ever you have done ?—Many of the unhappy persons, who will be shut out of Christ's Kingdom, are such as have sought to enter in ; but have sought negligently, or unseasonably. They are such as have heard him teach, eaten in his presence, and done many things in his name ; but still they have been workers of iniquity.

¿ Can you say more in your favour, than did the young ruler mentioned in the gospel ?—¿ Or have you been more solicitous than he, to learn the way to heaven ? But he parted with his Saviour: He wished to obtain eternal life ; but would not, for its sake, forego the interests of the world.

Have you been more diligent in seeking after Christ, than some, of whom we read, that they went from place to place, and crossed the sea to find him. And yet these were chiefly influenced by a desire to eat of his loaves.

Whatever pains you have taken in religion, and whatever attention you have paid to the

report

report of the gospel; if you have not actually submitted to its precepts, and yielded to the influence of its doctrines—if you have not consented, that Christ shall be yours in all his characters, and that you will be his with all your powers, you have no share in his salvation.

If you can suppose, that many have been lost, who have come as near to the kingdom of heaven as you; then fear lest you come short of it, and give all diligence to make your calling sure.

3. We learn from our subject, that the unsuccessfulness of the gospel is not always to be imputed to the want of fidelity or ability, in the preachers of it. It must often be ascribed to some other cause.

The prophets of old; the apostles of Jesus; yea, the Saviour himself complained, "¿ Who hath believed our report ?"

Zeal and diligence in ministers are doubtless important. As they are more wise and faithful, there is more reason to hope for success.

But there is something also for hearers to do. If they will not receive the report, it is published to them in vain.

Every one sees, that a minister should attend, with great concern, to the duties of his calling, because it is a solemn and weighty calling. ¿ But what makes it so solemn and weighty ?—Because it relates to men's salvation. Your salvation then is a weighty matter. ¿ And ought not *you* to attend to it ? Preaching is but a mean of salvation;

vation ; and means unapplied will never ſave your ſouls.

You think your miniſter ſhould be laborious in his work. ¿ But have you nothing to do ? He muſt watch for your ſouls. ¿ Muſt not you watch for your own ?

If a miniſter ſhould neglect the ſtated duties of his profeſſion, out of indolence, or love of the world—if he ſhould ſeldom appear in the ſanctuary to deliver the divine report, becauſe he was too much devoted to his eaſe, or too much entangled in the affairs of this life, to have leiſure or ſpirit for the ſacred ſervice ; you would not be in doubt what to think of him, nor very ſcrupulous what you ſaid of him.—But he is no more bound to preach, than you are to hear. If then worldly affections and cares have introduced into your ſouls ſuch an indifference, or diſreliſh to divine worſhip, that you attend it but ſeldom, and never with any ſpirit and zeal, pray, tell me, ¿ Why are not you as criminal as ſuch a miniſter ?

If a miniſter, inſtead of preaching on the great ſubjects, which concern men's ſalvation, ſhould only give lectures on hiſtory or aſtronomy, huſbandry or politicks ; though you might think him a man of learning, you would condemn him as unworthy the name of a miniſter. But if you attend more to the intereſts, honours or pleaſures of the world, than to the ſalvation of your ſouls, ¿ What are you better than he ?

As

As long as you refuſe to hear the truth, and to work out your ſalvation, it is a matter of little conſequence to you, whether your miniſter preaches on piety and religion, or on huſbandry and politicks; or indeed whether he preaches at all.

If you ſuppoſed, that a miniſter had no concern for men's ſalvation; and appeared in his deſk from week to week, only to exhibit his talents, or to ſecure a maintenance; you would think he ſhamefully proſtituted his profeſſion. But if his aim in preaching ſhould be to ſave your ſouls, your aim in hearing ſhould be to ſave your own. If then you come to the houſe of God only out of cuſtom, or to paſs away a dull hour; or if, while you are there, you are thoughtleſs and inattentive, or hear only to make unkind animadverſions; you are no better than the miniſter, who preaches for lucre or applauſe.

It is common to remark on the coldneſs of miniſters; but ¿ How will you excuſe your own indifference in a matter which infinitely concerns you?

You think that if miniſters were more zealous, you ſhould be ſo too. Perhaps alſo, if you were more attentive to the word preached, and more diligent in the work of your ſalvation, you would thus give ſome courage and animation to them. Let us then ſtrive together, and be fellow workers to the kingdom of God.

Some

Some are ready to ſay, "If we could hear the word preached in ſuch a manner—if ſuch doctrines were oftener taught—if the terrors of God's word were more ſtrongly diſplayed, and more cloſely applied; more good would be done, and we ſhould hope for ſome ſenſible benefit." With this expectation, they change the place of their attendance. But imagine not, that all the ſucceſs depends on the peculiar manner, or engaging addreſs of the ſpeaker. What are preachers, but miniſters by whom men believe even as the Lord gives to every man? Glory not in men. Remember that much depends on the bleſſing of God. And that you may receive this, repair to his houſe, hear his word with a humble quiet and teachable temper, and lift up your hearts to him for his grace to accompany it. Paul and Apollos can only plant and water. It is God who gives the increaſe. Look to him, that he would multiply the ſeed ſown, and cauſe it to bring forth fruit unto life eternal.

END OF THE TWENTYEIGHTH SERMON.

SERMON XXIX.

Pilate's indifference to the Truth.

JOHN xviii. 38.

Pilate saith unto him, ¿ What is truth ? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

JESUS was, by the Jewish council, brought before Pilate the Roman governor, and accused as one who perverted the nation from their allegiance, and forbade to give tribute to Cesar, saying, that he himself was a king. Pilate having heard the charge, demanded of him, " ¿ Art thou the king of the Jews ?" Jesus acknowledged, that he had called himself a king. But he added, " My kingdom is not of this world." If it were, " then would my servants fight; that I should not be delivered to the Jews." As I have not permitted, much less attempted any thing of this kind, it is manifest, that " my kingdom

dom is not from hence." Pilate ſays, "¿ Art thou a king then?" And yet thy kingdom not of this world? "¿ What ſort of kingdom doſt thou claim?" Jeſus explains the matter.—"It is as thou ſayeſt:" I am a king. But my kingdom conſiſts in the power and dominion of truth. "To this end was I born, and for this cauſe came I into the world, that I might bear witneſs to the truth;"—might reveal it by my doctrines, confirm it by my works, and impreſs it on men's hearts by my ſpirit. "Every one, who is of the truth, heareth my voice." They who believe the truth, and act under its influence, are my ſubjects.

Pilate ſeems, from this anſwer to be ſatisfied that Jeſus had no deſign againſt the civil government. He probably viewed his priſoner, as a new philoſopher, who was introducing ſome peculiar ſyſtem of opinions, which he affected to call by the name of *a kingdom*. But as long as he meddled not with affairs of ſtate, Pilate was willing, that he ſhould teach his own ſyſtem, and name it according to his own fancy.

Thus far Pilate diſcovered a commendable honeſty and candour. But his indifference to the *doctrine* of Chriſt was highly cenſurable. When Jeſus ſaid, "I came to bear witneſs to the truth;" Pilate indeed aſked, "¿ What is truth?" But, without waiting for an anſwer, he went out to the Jews, and ſaid, "I find no fault in him." He was neither diſpoſed to con-

demn him as a uſurper, nor to hear him as a teacher.

As Pilate was a Roman, who had reſided but a ſhort time in Judea, probably he was little acquainted with the ſcriptures of the Jews, and their expectations concerning the Meſſiah. He had, however full information, that this Jeſus aſſumed a high character. The report of his numerous miracles, and engaging manner of teaching, could not have eſcaped the governor's ears. He now had an opportunity to ſee Jeſus, and converſe with him perſonally. He had heard his priſoner declare, that he was ſent into the world to bear witneſs to the truth. He muſt have been convinced, from what had paſſed in his preſence, that this was no ordinary perſon, who now ſtood before him. He repeatedly acknowledged, that he could find no fault in him. Well he knew that the Jews had delivered him for envy. Various expedients he tried to calm their rage, and effect his releaſe. And, finally, when he gave ſentence againſt him, he waſhed his hands before the multitude, and ſaid, "I am innocent from the blood of this juſt man: See ye to it."

From theſe circumſtances, it is evident that he entertained a high opinion of Jeſus.

The governor had now the faireſt opportunity to learn the character which Chriſt had aſſumed, and the doctrine which he came to teach. He was ſitting on his judgment ſeat, and Jeſus was ſtanding before him. He might propoſe what

queſtions

queſtions he pleaſed: And to queſtions of importance, propoſed with an honeſt intention, Jeſus certainly would have returned a full anſwer. Pilate was acting in his official capacity, and no man would interrupt him. Who could wiſh to be under better advantages than theſe? But good as they were, no uſe did he make of them.

You think, perhaps, it had been happy for us, if Pilate had ſhown a little more regard to his own queſtion. It was really important; and you wiſh to know, how this divine inſtructor would have anſwered it. His anſwer might have ſolved many doubts, which often ariſe on the ſame queſtion.

To Pilate indeed it was important to have received an anſwer; and it was his own indifference which prevented it. But to you the queſtion is already anſwered. And whatever Jeſus might have ſaid on this occaſion, you would have learnt from it nothing more than you may now find in reading his goſpel. All his inſtructions are, in effect, anſwers to the ſame queſtion.

Our divine Lord perfectly knew what was in man. If Pilate propoſed the queſtion as a matter of curioſity, it might be expected, that Chriſt would anſwer it, as he anſwered other curious queſtions, by turning the enquirer's attention to ſomething, which more nearly concerned him. But if his deſire had been to receive inſtruction in ſuch truths as immediately related to his duty

and ſalvation, the anſwer of Jeſus would have been, in ſubſtance, the ſame, as he at other times gave to ſimilar queſtions. On your own account then, you have no cauſe to regret that Pilate's indifference prevented an anſwer.

If you enquire, what is the truth, in ſome of the queſtions, which have divided theological and metaphyſical diſputants; as how ſin firſt entered into God's creation, and why he has permitted it to exiſt—wherein conſiſts the moral freedom of rational beings, and how God carries on the great ſcheme of his government without controling this freedom—how the divine and human natures are united in Jeſus Chriſt; or even how fleſh and ſpirit are united in man—If ſuch as theſe are your enquiries, I cannot promiſe you, that you will find an anſwer in the goſpel. And I much doubt whether Chriſt would have anſwered them, if they had been propoſed when he was on earth.

But if your enquiries are concerning things of real importance to your ſalvation, you may certainly meet with abundant ſatisfaction. "God has given you all things, which pertain to life and godlineſs, through the knowledge of him, who has called you to glory and virtue."

Do you wiſh to know the character of the Deity, and how he is to be worſhipped? Read Chriſt's diſcourſe with the woman of Samaria. There you learn, that "God is a Spirit; and they who worſhip him, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and

and in truth." And they who thus worſhip him, are accepted, in whatever place their devotions are offered. Read alſo Paul's ſermon to the people of Athens. There you are taught that "God who made the world, and all things therein, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worſhipped by men's hands, as though he needed any thing from them, ſeeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things; and in him we live and move, and have our being."

¿ Would you know wherein your true happineſs conſiſts?——Read the beginning of Chriſt's ſermon on the mount. There you will find, that happineſs little depends on external circumſtances, but is eſſentially connected with a holy and virtuous temper of mind.

¿ Are you ſolicitous to underſtand the nature and extent of moral duties?—Read on in the ſame ſermon. There you have them, ſtated with preciſion, explained with perſpicuity, and reſcued from the vile interpretations, by which men of corrupt minds had perverted them.

¿ Would you be inſtructed, what is your great buſineſs in life, and what is the moſt worthy object of your purſuit?—Still read on. The Saviour tells you, "Lay not up for yourſelves treaſures on earth where moths corrupt, and thieves break through and ſteal; but lay up for yourſelves in heaven treaſures which will never fail." —"Take no thought for things which concern

the body; but ſeek firſt the kingdom of God, and theſe things ſhall be added."

¿ Do you enquire, what you muſt do to be ſaved?—Read Chriſt's anſwer to the rich young ruler.—"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." When, profeſſing to have done this from his youth, he aſked, what more was neceſſary, Jeſus replied, "If thou wilt be perfect, go, ſell that thou haſt and give to the poor, and thou ſhalt have treaſure in heaven: And come, follow me." You hence learn, that a partial and external obſervance of the commands of God will not intitle you to heaven; but there muſt be in your heart ſuch a ſupreme love to God, ſuch a full ſubmiſſion to the Saviour, and ſuch a ſtrong regard to the future world, as ſhall raiſe you above earthly things, and diſpoſe you to uſe them charitably, while you have them, and reſign them cheerfully, when providence demands them. The anſwer which the apoſtles of Jeſus gave to ſimilar enquiries, though expreſſed in different words, is, in ſubſtance the ſame. "Repent and be converted, that your ſins may be blotted out." "Believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and ye ſhall be ſaved."

¿ Are you deſirous to form a juſt idea of the *manner* in which you muſt ſeek ſalvation?—Hear what Chriſt ſaid, when one aſked him, whether few would be ſaved. "Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate, for many will ſeek to enter in, and will not be able. When the maſter of

the

the houſe has ſhut the door, many will knock, and ſay, Lord, open to us, for we have eaten and drunk in thy preſence, and thou haſt taught in our ſtreets. But he will ſay, I know you not: Depart from me all workers of iniquity." You here ſee, that you muſt ſeek ſalvation with diligence, and without delay; not merely by an obſervance of the forms of religion, but by renouncing every ſin, and complying with every duty. To the ſame purpoſe is Paul's advice; "Work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling, for it is God, who worketh in you—Do all things without murmuring or diſputing."

You will aſk perhaps, ¿What ground is there to believe, that God will work in us?—Hear the words of Chriſt himſelf. "I ſay unto you, aſk and ye ſhall receive—If a parent will give bread to his children, ¿How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them who aſk him?

¿Would you learn, which are the principal duties of religion?—Jeſus has told you—"Theſe are to love God with all your heart, and your neighbours as yourſelves. On theſe two hang all the law and the prophets."

In ſhort—If you wiſh to be informed, what are the moſt important and intereſting doctrines in the ſyſtem of religious truths; only conſider, what are the doctrines, which Chriſt and his

apoſtles

apoſtles have moſt frequently inculcated, and moſt warmly urged.

Say now, whether, on the important queſtion, "¿ What is truth ?" you need farther inſtruction than Chriſt has given you.

If you ſeek inſtruction with the ſpirit of his diſciples, who love the truth and hear his voice, you will learn all that immediately relates to your duty, and eſſentially concerns your ſalvation. If your enquiries are directed to different objects, look not to Chriſt for an anſwer. He came, not to gratify an idle curioſity, but to guide the meek in judgement, and teach the humble his way.

Beware, however, that you indulge not the ſame indifference which you condemn in Pilate, He declared Jeſus to be an innocent and juſt man; but he ſtill remained an unbeliever. You have the goſpel of Chriſt, and you profeſs to believe that it is divine. Learn then what it teaches, and practiſe what it requires.

There are, doubtleſs many as negligent as this heathen was: We will conſider ſome inſtances, in which this criminal negligence appears.

There is, in ſome, an indifference to religion in general.

Perhaps they outwardly conform to the prevailing uſage of their country; but ſcarcely ſpend a thought, whether the common religion is true, or whether, in reality, there is any ſuch thing.

They

They think it beſt for mankind, that ſome apprehenſions of a Deity and a future judgment, and ſome forms of religious worſhip, ſhould be kept up in the world; becauſe theſe tend to peace and good order. But to religion, conſidered as a mean of rendering us acceptable to God, and of preparing us for future happineſs, they pay no attention.

They may think, that a general acquaintance with the common ſentiments of the time and place, is a neceſſary part of a good education, becauſe it qualifies a man for converſation in ſome ſorts of company. But farther than this, they care little about it. They learn the religion of their own country, for the ſame reaſon, that they would ſtudy the language and manners of a foreign country, if they were going to travel there.

But if we are rational and immortal creatures, religion muſt be a matter of infinite importance to us all; and every man is bound immediately to examine what it is. If he is in doubt, whether chriſtianity is divine, he ought to enquire into its evidences. When he is ſettled in a general belief of its divinity, he is not to reſt here but to apply himſelf, without delay, to obtain a knowledge of its doctrines, and an intereſt in its promiſes.

There are many, who acknowledge, in general, the truth of the goſpel; but neglect to enquire, whether they are conformed to it.

If

If they ſhould meet with a profeſſed infidel, they would urge upon him a care to examine ſo important a matter, as the truth of revelation. If he appeared to diſregard their advice, they would wonder at his negligence in a caſe ſo intereſting. And yet they are as inattentive to the ſtate of religion in their own hearts, as the infidel is to the credibility of revelation.

But, my friends, ¿ What is the goſpel like to do for you, if you have not ſubmitted to it ? ¿ What advantage do you expect from it, without obeying it ? ¿ And where is your conſiſtency, in being ſolicitious that others ſhould believe it, while you neglect to ſecure the bleſſings of it ?

There are ſome, who aſſent to the great doctrines of the goſpel, and underſtand the eſſential terms of acceptance with God ; and, though their conſciences teſtify, that they have never complied with theſe terms, they are little affected with the danger of their condition.

One would think that *this* ſhould be daily in their minds—ſhould call them often to their cloſets, and warm their hearts, when they are there—ſhould check the levity of their ſpirits, and give a diſtaſte to every ſenſual indulgence. But ſtill their time is divided between their buſineſs and their amuſements. If convictions, now and then, ariſe uninvited, and ſerious thoughts inſenſibly ſteal upon them, they ſmother

er them in the cares, or diſſipate them in the pleaſures of life.

There are others who delay the work of religion for the preſent, and content themſelves with the purpoſe of a future application to it.

¿ Are not ſome of you, who now hear me, to be found in this claſs ? You call him careleſs and negligent, who attends not to his worldly buſineſs in the proper ſeaſon. ¿ Does not the deſcription belong to you, while you delay a buſineſs of infinitely higher importance ? Behold, now is the day of ſalvation. The morrow is not yours. You know not what it will bring forth. You would not dare, I ſuppoſe, finally to diſmiſs all concern about religion, and to fix a reſolution, that you will never think of it again. But if it is too important to be forever neglected, it is too important to be at all delayed. Future opportunities are at beſt, uncertain. It is certain none will be better than the preſent.

Further : If you are not on your guard againſt ſin ; if you expoſe yourſelves to viſible temptations, or run into any known and obvious wickedneſs, you diſcover as little regard to religion, as little concern about futurity, as Pilate did.

He was careleſs about religion in general. He ſeemed indifferent what it was, or whether there were any ſuch thing. You believe, that there is ſuch a thing, and that it is to be found among chriſtians only. Thus far you are ſettled ; and thus far it is well. ¿ But what is

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the design of religion? ¿ Does it not teach you to depart from iniquity, and to live piously, justly and soberly? ¿ Does it give you hope and comfort in any other way? ¿ And will you still go on fearless in a course of sin? ¿ Will you practise the very things, which your religion condemns? ¿ Will you venture into the places of temptation? ¿ Can you reflect on your past sins without remorse, and repeat them without concern? ¿ What benefit then do you expect from your religion?

A neglect of, or negligent attendance on the appointed means of religion, indicates a spirit of indifference.

You have God's word. ¿ Does it lie by you unexamined? His house is near you. ¿ Do you withdraw your feet from it? ¿ Or do you read and hear the solemn truths of religion, without attention and self application? ¿ Is your mind wholly unimpressed with the warnings which are given you? ¿ Do you make light of the calls and invitations of divine grace? ¿ When you hear the terms of salvation proposed, can you reject them without concern; and depart from God's house, with the same cold heart, which you brought there? ¿ Do you live without prayer—without communion with God in the closet or family?—Think not of Pilate's indifference. Be astonished at your own.

To awaken the attention of mankind to the calls of religion, ¿ What arguments can be used?

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The ſubject ſpeaks loudly for itſelf. No arguments can be urged, of greater force and efficacy, than the natural voice of religion proclaiming its own importance. Every man knows, that if there is a Supreme Deity, there muſt be ſuch a thing as religion; and that this muſt, in its very nature, immediately, infinitely, and eternally, concern every rational creature; and himſelf no leſs than others. And the man who with this conviction, can compoſe his mind to a ſtate of indifference, and diſmiſs all ſolicitude, either to know what religion is, or to comply with its demands and ſecure its hopes, ſeems to have nonpluſſed all the powers of reaſon and eloquence—every power, but that which is divine. For no argument can be ſet before him more forcible, than that which he already knows, but does not regard—already confeſſes, but does not feel.

Only then attend to the nature of religion—conſider the vaſt concern which you have in it—view life, as it is, a probationary ſtate ſoon to terminate, according to the choice you make, in felicity or in woe. Remember what heaven has done to bring you acquainted with religion, and to urge your compliance with it. Look forward to that ſerious hour, when you will ſtand between this and the eternal world. Anticipate the apprehenſions, which guilt will then feel; the judgment which wiſdom will then form; and the joys, which piety will then give.

give. Make now the choice, which you will hereafter approve; and reprobate the conduct, which soon you must condemn. You cannot feel indifferent about religion long. Indulge your indifference no longer.

END OF THE TWENTYNINTH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XXX.

The horrible Guilt of those who strengthen the hands of the wicked.

JEREMIAH xxiii. 14.

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing:—They strengthen the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness.

WHILE the Jews continued under God's special care and protection, he favoured them with the stated ministry of his holy prophets, who, as occasion required, warned them of their dangers, reproved them for their iniquities, and exhorted them to repentance. The plainness of their preaching, and the severity of their rebukes, in times of degeneracy, often awakened the angry resentments of their hearers. In these times there arose false prophets, who, to gain popular applause, preached smooth and flattering doctrines. Such preachers met with a welcome reception among the vicious and

ungodly; who always love to have their guilty conſciences pacified, without the ſelfdenial of forſaking their ſins.

Theſe deceivers and flatterers of the people, God by his prophet condemns in the latter part of this chapter, and particularly in the words which have been read.

That the wicked ſhould forſake their way, muſt evidently be agreeable to the will of a holy and merciful God. Every thing, therefore, which tends to encourage their hearts in impenitence, and ſtrengthen their hands in iniquity, muſt highly provoke his diſpleaſure.

Various are the ways, in which ſinners ſtrengthen each other's hands. Example and enticement; an open neglect and avowed contempt of the inſtituted means of religion; pleading in defence of vice; ridiculing the virtues of a godly character; oppoſition to the great doctrines of religion; and the propagation of corrupt and licentious opinions, all tend to this iſſue.

"Now whatever be the means, by which men ſtrengthen the hands, and hinder the repentance of evildoers, they commit an horrible thing in the ſight of God."

This is the obſervation which lies before us, and which we will endeavour to illuſtrate.

1. All ſin is horrible in its nature.

It is contrary to the character and will of an infinite Being—a Being of glorious purity, ſupreme

preme authority and almighty power—a Being who cannot be tempted with evil, nor even look on iniquity—a Being, in whoſe preſence the ſtars are extinguiſhed, and the angels veil their faces.

"Sin, by the commandment, becomes exceeding ſinful." Every offence abounds in the view of the conſcience, when the law with power enters the mind. This is exceeding broad. It extends to every motion of the heart, and action of the life. It requires truth in the inward parts, and holineſs in all the converſation. It forbids the act of iniquity, and condemns the thought of fooliſhneſs.

God's utter abhorrence of ſin is clearly marked by the awful judgments, which, in his providence, are executed on the workers of iniquity; and more ſtrongly expreſſed by the amazing puniſhment, which, in his word, is threatened againſt the finally impenitent.

The purity of the divine character, and the horrible nature of ſin, are ſtill more ſtrikingly diſplayed in the grand and ſurpriſing method adopted for the redemption of our degenerate and guilty race. We are not redeemed from our vain converſation, by ſilver and gold, but by the precious blood of the Son of God. The great God our Saviour gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from our iniquities, and ſave us from the wrath to come.

If all ſin is ſo contrary to the holy nature and perfect law of God, and to the merciful deſign of the Saviour's death; think, I beſeech you, what indignity, what inſult, you offer to the divine majeſty, when you not only do iniquity yourſelves, but ſtrengthen them who do it. To have pleaſure in them who work evil, and to delight in the perverſeneſs of the wicked, is the completion of a vicious character, and the laſt ſtage in the progreſs of guilt.

What a fearful thing muſt it be, to fall into the hands of the living God, thus diſhonoured and provoked!—Who knows the power of his anger!

2. To ſtrengthen the hands and hinder the repentance of ſinners, is to oppoſe the great plan of the divine government. It is to ſet your faces and lift your hands againſt the Almighty.

Ever ſince the apoſtaſy of our race, all the meaſures of the divine government have been uniformly directed to the great and benevolent purpoſe of recovering ſinners from their wickedneſs, and bringing them to repentance and happineſs.

For this end, God was pleaſed, immediately after our revolt, to reveal a Saviour, who ſhould make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs. For this purpoſe he ſent forth his prophets and miniſters, inſpired them with divine and heavenly knowledge by his

his own good Spirit, and commanded them to admoniſh and inſtruct a ſecure and guilty world.

With the ſame merciful intention, he has given a ſtanding revelation of his will, explained the nature and diſplayed the importance of the religion which he requires; confirmed this revelation by miracles, preſerved it by his providence, and continued, from age to age, the evidence of its divine original, by the ſtriking accompliſhment of a ſeries of marvellous predictions.

In purſuance of this great and glorious deſign, he ſent down from heaven his own Son, the expreſs image of his perſon, who, having aſſumed our fleſh, dwelt among men, taught the way of God in truth, ſuffered death to expiate our guilt, roſe from the grave to diſplay his power over death, and returned to heaven to appear as an advocate for us. With this view, he has alſo inſtituted the publick preaching of the goſpel, and commiſſioned his miniſters to warn every man and teach every man in all wiſdom, and beſeech them, in his name, to be reconciled to him.

The diſpenſations of his providence are adapted and intended to make all men know, that to forſake him, is an evil and a bitter thing. The connexion between vice and miſery, and between virtue and happineſs, is obvious to common obſervation, and felt in common experience. This divine eſtabliſhment is deſigned as a ſtanding

call to virtue, and warning againſt vice. Beſides this, God often ſees fit, by publick and national calamities, to condemn and puniſh a general corruption of manners.

In addition to all the external means of repentance and holineſs, God, unſought and unſolicited, grants to ſinners the awakening and convincing influences of his gracious Spirit. Theſe divine operations are ſometimes carried ſo high, that the ſpirit is ſaid to *ſtrive* with them; and continued ſo long, that he is ſaid to be *grieved*, and even *wearied* with their perverſeneſs.

Such meaſures God has taken, and ſuch he is ſtill purſuing, for the recovery of ſinners. ¿What a horrible thing muſt it then be, for you to ſtrengthen their guilty hands, embolden their daring hearts, and prevent their return to God? —¿What impious oppoſition is this to his holy will?—¿What inſult on his authority?—¿What contempt of his power and grace, his wiſdom and love?—¿What can be conceived more inſolent and provoking?—¿"How ſhall he pardon you for this?"

3. To ſtrengthen the hands of the wicked is a horrible thing, becauſe it directly tends to the miſery of mankind; and therefore is the reverſe of that benevolence, which ought to govern us in all our conduct toward one another.

The tendency of a wicked life is miſery in this world; and the end of it, more intolerable miſery in the next. Repentance is the only condition of the divine pardon; holineſs is an

indiſpenſible

indiſpenſible qualification for that eternal happineſs, which the goſpel reveals.

The fruits and conſequences of final impenitence are, in ſcripture, repreſented by language of moſt awful import, and by images which ſtrike the feeling and attentive mind with amazement and horror.

That they will be dreadful, beyond our preſent conceptions, may juſtly be concluded from the nature of ſin as an oppoſition to God's character and government; and eſpecially from the extraordinary method which he has taken for our redemption. Had not the demerit of ſin been exceedingly great, a divine Saviour would not have interpoſed by his own death to reſcue us from it.

Conſider then, ye who ſtrengthen the hands of the ſinner, you are urging him forward into that everlaſting deſtruction, which is ſo great, ſo amazingly great, that to ſave men from it, the Son of God himſelf ſuffered a moſt painful death. If you obſtruct and prevent his repentance, you hinder him from obtaining a ſhare in that ſalvation which was purchaſed, not by ſilver and gold, but by the precious blood of a divine Redeemer. Can you think it a ſmall thing to be active in bringing one of your fellow immortals to a condition ſo awful, as that which awaits the ungodly?

The apoſtle cautions Chriſtians, not to uſe their liberty, in a manner which might embol-

den others in inquity, or prove a ſtumbling block to the weak, leſt by theſe means, a brother ſhould periſh for whom Chriſt died. For when we ſin againſt our brother, we ſin againſt Chriſt. Now if it be criminal and dangerous to occaſion the deſtruction of others by an imprudent uſe of innocent liberty, ¿ What a horrible thing muſt it be, directly and intentionally to ſtrengthen the hands of the wicked, and throw obſtructions in the way of their repentance? Awful is the denunciation of the Son of God againſt thoſe, who ſhut up the kingdom of heaven againſt men, and neither enter into it themſelves, nor ſuffer thoſe, who are entering, to come in.

Conſider farther; when you ſtrengthen the hands of an evildoer, you contribute to the ſpread and diffuſion of vice and miſery. If one ſinner repents, and turns to a godly life, none can tell how much evil may be prevented, and how much good may be done. If this ſinner continues in his guilty courſe, we cannot meaſure the greatneſs, nor comprehend the extent of the miſchief which may follow. He may corrupt and deſtroy others; and theſe may ſtill ſpread the corruption farther; and from hand to hand, it may be circulated round to an unknown diſtance, and be tranſmitted down to remote generations. And how many will finally periſh, by means of one ſinner whom you have ſtrengthened, you cannot foreſee.

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If you ſhould hereafter be convinced of the error of your ways, yet you will not be able to recall the corruptions which you have communicated, nor to repair the miſchiefs which you have occaſioned. Some, whom you have ſeduced, may be already in a ſtate of puniſhment. If they are alive, yet they may not be within *your* reach; or they may by this time be too much confirmed in wickedneſs, to be recovered by *your* advice. Or could you reclaim *them*, yet you know not how many they have ſeduced. The evil, which originated with you, may now be propagated too far, and infuſed into too many for you to think of extinguiſhing it. If by your repentance, you can ſave your own ſoul, it is happy: You cannot, by your counſels and warnings, ſave theirs.

If your ſtrengthening the hands of evildoers may be productive of ſo great, ſo extenſive, ſo laſting miſchief to the ſouls of your fellow men, ¿ Muſt you not confeſs it to be a horrible thing?

4. By this conduct, you ſupport the cauſe, and cooperate with the influence of that evil ſpirit, who works in the children of diſobedience.

Sin was firſt introduced into our world by the artifice of Satan, who, by pride and rebellion, having fallen under God's wrath, ſeduced man into tranſgreſſion. He is ſtill carrying on a deſign in oppoſition to the kingdom of God. He ſtill goes about ſeeking whom he may deſtroy. He is called the ruler of the darkneſs of this world,

world, and the prince of the power of the air. The place where error and vice abound, is called the place, where Satan's throne is. His kingdom is a kingdom of darkneſs, deluſion and wickedneſs: The kingdom of God is a kingdom of light, truth and benevolence. They who pervert the right ways of the Lord, and turn others from the faith, imitate the character, ſecond the deſign, and do the work of the devil; and are called his children, his miniſters and ſervants. They are agents in his cauſe, and factors in his trade. They act under his influence, and in conformity to his will; they muſt therefore, take a ſhare in his puniſhment hereafter, as well as in his guilt and infamy here.

While we contemplate, with horror, the character of infernal ſpirits, drawn in the ſacred writings, we ſhould conſider it as a moſt horrible thing for human beings, in a ſtate of probation, to imitate this character.

Thoſe evil ſpirits, who left their own habitation, are reſerved in everlaſting chains under darkneſs to the judgment of the great day. For them no redemption is provided; to them no probation is granted; hope never caſts a ſmile on them.

We are placed under hope. Salvation is purchaſed for us, and offered to us. A day of probation is aſſigned us. We are all under like circumſtances of guilt and danger, and under like offers of grace and pardon; and we are

all

all expoſed to the machinations of a common enemy. ¿ Shall any of us revolt from the intereſt of humanity and love, and join the adverſary ? O ye heavens, be aſtoniſhed at this, and be ye horribly afraid !—Let us ſtretch out friendly hands, encourage, animate and ſtrengthen one another in the work of our common ſalvation, and become fellow helpers to the kingdom of God.

5. To ſtrengthen the hands of the wicked is a horrible thing, becauſe we thus become partakers of their ſins.

When others, by our enticement, example, or encouragement, or in conſequence of any licentious errors, which they have caught from us, are induced to commit iniquity, we ſhare with them in the guilt. They are anſwerable for yielding to our influence, in oppoſition to the better information, which they have received ; but we muſt ſtand anſwerable for all that we have ſpoken and done, to draw them away from virtue and truth ; and for our neglect of that which we ſhould have done to lead and encourage them in the path of wiſdom, and prevent their apoſtaſy. If we have ſeduced them to, or encouraged them in, an evil courſe; while they purſue it, they are ſinning at our expenſe, and at our riſk, as well as their own. They are agents and factors under us, and with them we muſt finally divide the fatal reward of iniquity.

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Let us realize, how great is the guilt of our own proper iniquities, and we ſhall think it a horrible thing to augment it by a participation in the guilt of other men. ¿ And yet how great a proportion of ſome men's guilt will come from this quarter? They have done much to corrupt from virtue the ſimple and incautious, and to confirm evildoers in their wickedneſs. Their influence has run far, and ſpread wide. It operates, at diſtant hand, on many whom they never have ſeen. It works without their knowledge, grows while they ſleep, and is accumulating their guilt, while they are unaware of the miſchief. Of thoſe who bring in damnable hereſies, and who ſeduce many to follow their pernicious ways, the apoſtle ſays, " Their judgment now, of a long time, lingereth not, and their damnation ſlumbereth not.

6. The ſin under conſideration is an horrible thing, as it is directly contrary to the commands of God, and marked with his peculiar abhorrence.

We are required to rebuke our brother, and not ſuffer ſin upon him—to exhort one another, leſt any be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin—to take heed leſt any root of bitterneſs, ſpringing up, trouble us, and thereby many be defiled—to have compaſſion on ſinners, and ſave them with fear, pulling them out of the fire—to beware, leſt we put a ſtumbling block, or an occaſion to fall, in our brother's way.

Of

Of him who turneth away from the law of God and draweth others after him, Moſes ſays, "The Lord will not ſpare him, but the anger of the Lord will ſmoke againſt him, and he will ſeparate him to all evil." The moſt infamous part of Jeroboam's character was, that he made Iſrael to ſin; and this is aſſigned as a ſpecial reaſon of God's judgment on him and his houſe. The chief ground of the woes denounced againſt the Phariſees, was, that they ſhut up the kingdom of God againſt men. God's juſtice is glorified in heaven for his vengeance on thoſe who had corrupted the earth. One can ſcarcely without ſhuddering, read Paul's awful rebuke on the ſorcerer of Paphos, who ſought by his artifice to turn away from the faith the deputy of the country—"O full of all ſubtilty and all miſchief, thou child of the Devil, thou enemy of all righteouſneſs; ¿ Wilt thou not ceaſe to pervert the right ways of the Lord? Behold now the hand of the Lord is upon thee".—Paul ſays of thoſe Jews, who forbade the apoſtles to ſpeak to the Gentiles, that they might be ſaved, "They pleaſe not God, and are contrary to all men; they fill up the meaſure of their ſins always, that wrath may come upon them to the uttermoſt."

We ſee then the horrible nature, and fearful danger of the ſin condemned in the text—ſtrengthening the hands of evildoers, that

none

none doth return from his wickedneſs." Let us apply the ſubject.

You will firſt apply it to the miniſters of the goſpel, and the publick teachers of religion. I muſt juſtify the application. Doubtleſs they are deeply concerned in it. If they ceaſe to warn the wicked of his evil way—if they pervert the word of God—if by their example they countenance wickedneſs, or by their doctrine diſſeminate error, it may juſtly be apprehended that many will periſh by their means, and at their hands will be required the ſouls which thus are loſt. But know, my brethren, your miniſter is not alone concerned in the ſubject. Permit him in his turn, to apply to you.

You have declared yourſelves the ſubjects of God's kingdom; ſee that you ſhut not up the way to it, and that you lay no obſtructions before thoſe who are entering into it. Provide things honeſt in the ſight of all men. Take heed leſt, by your means, the way of truth be evil ſpoken of. Let your converſation in all things, be as becomes the goſpel of Chriſt. If you walk according to the courſe of this world, fulfilling the deſires of the fleſh and of the mind; if you neglect the worſhip and ordinances of God's houſe; if you talk lightly about the doctrines and duties of religion; if you plead in favour of corrupt opinions; or propagate by your diſcourſe, or other means, thoſe ſentiments, which tend to beguile unſtable ſouls; you do more to

ſtrengthen

ſtrengthen the hands of the wicked, and to prevent their repentance, than if you had never aſſumed the chriſtian character.

Many are looking to you; ſome that they may be guided by your example; ſome that they may mark your miſcarriages, and find occaſion to reproach both you and your religion. Walk in a plain path becauſe of your obſervers; by well doing put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh men; ſhew yourſelves in all things a pattern of good works, that they, who would accuſe you, may be aſhamed, having no evil thing to ſay of you.

Heads of families will not fail to apply a ſubject ſo pertinent to them.

The virtue of thoſe under your care depends much on your prudence and fidelity. If you command your children and houſehold, and train them up in virtuous ſentiments and manners, you may hope, that, through God's grace, they will keep the way of the Lord, and that you ſhall rejoice, beholding their good converſation in Chriſt. But if they make themſelves vile, and you lay on them no reſtraints, and give them no warning of their danger; if amidſt the inſtructions which cauſe to err, you leave them unguarded and defenceleſs; if, far from inſtructing and warning them in this unexperienced and critical period, you corrupt them by your own example and converſation, ſtrengthen their hands in their evil

works,

works, and fortify their conſciences againſt the calls to repentance; ¿ What will you do, when God riſeth up; and when he viſiteth, what will you anſwer him? If it be a horrible thing to ſtrengthen other ſinners in wickedneſs, ¿ What name ſhall we find to expreſs your guilt, when you hide yourſelves from your own fleſh, and harden yourſelves againſt them, as if they were not yours?

Let the young beware, leſt they ſtrengthen each other's hands in evil doing.

You have opportunities to do much good, or much evil among thoſe of your age, and thoſe who often aſſociate with you.

If deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of religion and the future world, you walk in the path of wiſdom and virtue; if you have no fellowſhip with the wicked in their evil works, but rather reprove them; your preſence will reſtrain the vicious, your reproofs awaken the careleſs, and your examples ſtrengthen the virtuous. A reformation diſcovering itſelf among a few, may hopefully ſpread and extend its influence to many.

But if you walk in vanity and vice, ſet your tongues againſt the heavens; make light of the great concerns of futurity; hear with eagerneſs, and communicate with pleaſure, the ſentiments which tend to licentiouſneſs; make a mock of ſin, and of the threatenings of God; and labour to fortify yourſelves and others againſt the convictions,

convictions, which might lead to repentance; you will do more, than you can imagine, to corrupt the young generation, to which you belong, and, alas, I fear, few of you will return from your wickedneſs.

Finally. If it is ſo horrible a thing to ſtrengthen evildoers, it is horrible alſo to be ſtrengthened in evil doing. Beware then, leſt, being corrupted by the example and advice of the wicked, you grow bold in ſin, and, become hardened in guilt. "If ſinners entice thee, hearken not to them. Enter not into the path of the wicked; go not in the way of evil men: Avoid it, paſs not by it, turn from it and paſs away! Get wiſdom, take faſt hold of inſtruction; let her not go: Keep her, for ſhe is thy life, exalt her, and ſhe ſhall promote thee; forſake her not, and ſhe ſhall preſerve thee."

THE END OF THE THIRTIETH SERMON.

SERMON XXXI.

The wonderful Destruction of those who despise the Gospel.

ACTS xiii. 40, 41.

Beware therefore lest that come upon you, which is spokenof in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish: For I work a work in your days; a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it to you.

THE Apostle Paul, preaching to the Jews in Antioch, gives them a summary view of the nature and evidences of the gospel, its extensive design, and its glorious privileges; and then in the words of our text, solemnly warns them of that destruction, which, by their contempt of this gospel, they were urging on themselves. "Beware lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets."

The passage in the prophets, to which the Apostle alludes, is in Habakkuk, Chap. i. ver. 5. "Behold

"Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellouſly: For I work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you." The event here predicted is God's work of judgment on impenitent ſinners; as appears from the following verſes, in which the terrible deſolation coming on the guilty land of Judea, is drawn in all the ſtrong colours of prophetick deſcription.

"Behold, ye deſpiſers, and periſh," i. e. Ye, who are deſpiſers, will periſh. In the ſame form of ſpeech, Peter expreſſes the doom of the ſorcerer: "Thy money periſh with thee," or thy money will periſh with thee. "Wonder and periſh!" i. e. Ye will periſh wonderfully—in a manner which ye will not believe though it be told you. The expreſſion is agreeable to the idiom of the ſcripture language. God's *purpoſe* and *grace* ſignify his gracious purpoſe. *Life* and *immortality* are immortal life. The deſires of the *fleſh* and of the *mind* are the deſires of the fleſhly mind. The things which pertain to *life* and *godlineſs* are the things which pertain to a godly life.

The words of our text will lead us,

I. To conſider the character of theſe *deſpiſers*, who are ſo ſolemnly warned of their danger.

II. To ſhew in what reſpects it may be ſaid, They will periſh *wonderfully*.

III. To enforce the warning which is given them: *Beware* leſt this deſtruction come upon you.

I. We will consider the character of these *despisers*.

As the Apostle is opening the nature, proposing the evidences, and displaying the grace of the gospel, so, by *despisers*, he must intend those who despise religion; especially such as treat with contempt the great salvation purchased by the son of God, and preached by the apostles in his name.

1. There are some who despise *all religion*, and reject even those fundamental principles, which revelation presupposes; such as the existence and providence of God, the difference between moral good and evil, and the freedom and accountableness of man.

Such despisers there were in David's time. "The wicked triumph, and the workers of iniquity boast themselves, and utter hard things; they slay the widow and murder the fatherless; yet they say, The Lord will not see, neither will the God of Jacob regard it."—"The wicked, through the pride of their countenance, will not seek after God. They say, God hath forgotten. He hideth his face, he will never see it. They contemn God, and say in their heart, Thou wilt not require it." The prophet Isaiah complains of some atheistical mockers, who, when God called to mourning and weeping, gave themselves to luxury and riot, saying, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

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If men can perſuade themſelves that there is no God, or that he exerciſes no moral government; that there is no difference between virtue and vice, except ſo far as the one, or the other may ſerve their preſent convenience; and that, conſequently, there is no future ſtate of retribution; they will, of courſe, view religion in whatever form it appears, as alike uſeleſs and vain. The only religion, in this caſe, is to enjoy life while we can, and deſpiſe death when it comes.

But theſe licentious ſentiments are ſo contrary to the dictates of reaſon and common ſenſe, that men can never entertain them, unleſs their minds are firſt debauched by the habits of vice, and their judgments perverted by a conſciouſneſs of guilt. They who ſay in their hearts, there is no God, are corrupt, and have done abominable works. They admit the principles of irreligion, to fortify their conſciences againſt the terrors of a future judgment. Theſe principles muſt be the effects of previous corruption: They cannot be the ſuggeſtions of ſober reaſon. We need but open our eyes to be rationally convinced of the exiſtence and government of one eternal, independent, all perfect Being. "The inviſible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead." As we are intelligent creatures, we muſt be accountable for our conduct. Our natural deſire of immortality ſhews, that we are deſigned

for a future exiſtence. As God is a holy and righteous governor, we may naturally expect that he will make a difference between the virtuous and the wicked. In the preſent ſtate there is no equal diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments; there muſt then be another ſtate in which this diſtribution may take place.

2. There are ſome, who pretend to believe the truths of natural religion; but deſpiſe *all revelation.* From the ſuppoſed ſufficiency of human reaſon for all the purpoſes of religion, they conclude, that no ſupernatural diſcovery ever has been, or ever will be made.

They, indeed, profeſs to believe as much of the Bible, as reaſon previouſly dictates; for truth is not the leſs truth for being found there, but on the *authority* of revelation they will believe nothing; for if reaſon is ſufficient, revelation is needleſs.

In the days of the apoſtles there were many, who, profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, became fools. In their exalted opinion of human wiſdom, they deſpiſed as fooliſhneſs the doctrine of the croſs. But, with all their wiſdom they knew not God—knew not his true character, nor the way of acceptance with him. It therefore pleaſed God, by this which the world called the fooliſhneſs of preaching, to ſave them who believed. The doctrine of a Saviour, crucified for the ſins of men, was to the Jews a ſtumbling block, and

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to the Greeks foolishness; but to them who were saved, it was the power and the wisdom of God.

Reason and revelation choose to walk hand in hand; and nothing can be more unkind than to set them at variance.

Reason is employed in discovering the existence and perfections of God—in examining the evidences of revelation—in ascertaining the sense of particular doctrines and precepts, and, in making the proper application of them to ourselves. But then reason, with its highest improvements, cannot without the aid of revelation, lead us to the knowledge of all necessary truths.

There are many things, which though they appear reasonable, when they are suggested, yet, without a previous suggestion, would never have occurred to our thoughts. The knowledge of natural religion is much improved by the gospel. The most learned men among the heathens had but imperfect and confused notions of the divine character and government, of moral obligation and a future state, in comparison with the knowledge now attained by common christians. ¿What can it be but the gospel, which makes this difference? Reason was as good in ancient, as it is in modern times. Besides, there are some important matters concerning which reason can give us no satisfactory information.

Every man, on the least attention, must be convinced, that he has violated the moral ob-

ligations under which his Creator has placed him. He is then worthy of punishment. ¿ And how shall he know, whether God will forgive him? If he hopes that forgiveness may be obtained, yet ¿ How shall he learn, what terms God will require? Repentance is a reasonable exercise: ¿ But can this, on its own intrinsick worth, claim forgiveness? The sinner is dependant on the mercy of God; but how far, how often, to what subjects, and on what conditions he will shew mercy, we learn only from revelation; reason cannot inform us.

Much less could reason discover the method, in which God dispenses his pardoning mercy to fallen men. It is the gospel only, which teaches us, how God can be just and the justifier of them who believe. The sufferings of the son of God for the redemption of an apostate race, is the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which he has revealed by his spirit.

3. There are some, who acknowledge, in general, the truth of the gospel; but despise its *peculiar doctrines.*

In our Saviour's day, many among his professed disciples, offended at the doctrine of his atonement for human guilt, went back and walked no more with him.

Paul speaks of some, who, by denying the resurrection, had made shipwreck of their own faith; and, by teaching that the resurrection was past, had overthrown the faith of others.

Peter

Peter forewarns chriſtians, that, in the laſt days, there will come ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts, and ſaying, ¿ Where is the promiſe of Chriſt's coming to judge the world?

John ſpeaks of certain deceivers, who denied, that Jeſus Chriſt was come in the fleſh, and conſequently denied the reality of his atonement for the ſins of men. "Every ſpirit" ſays this Apoſtle, "which confeſſeth not that Jeſus Chriſt is come in the fleſh, is the ſpirit of antichriſt." A denial of his incarnation and atonement, is, in effect, a denial of the whole goſpel—a rejection of all its peculiar doctrines. Theſe deceivers profeſſed to be without ſin. As they had no ſenſible conviction of their own guilt, they ſaw no occaſion for an expiatory ſacrifice. Hence they went into the viſionary opinion, that Chriſt ſuffered only in appearance, not in reality.

In oppoſition to this dangerous hereſy, the apoſtle, in the beginning of his epiſtle, aſſerts the univerſal ſinfulneſs of mankind, as the true reaſon of Chriſt's incarnation and death.—"The blood of Jeſus Chriſt, the Son of God, cleanſeth us from all ſin. If we ſay that we have no ſin, we deceive ourſelves, and the truth is not in us. If we confeſs our ſins, God is faithful and juſt to forgive us our ſins, and to cleanſe us from all unrighteouſneſs. If we ſay that we have not ſinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. If any man ſin we have an

advocate

advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Christ came to seek and to save them who are lost. If we are not lost, we need none to seek us. If we have not sinned, we need none to save us. The whole plan of the gospel is founded in the supposition of human apostasy, depravity and guilt. If you deny this, it is absurd to talk of redemption by Christ; for what is there, from which rectitude and innocence need to be redeemed? Whatever respect you may profess for the gospel; if you believe that human nature is unpolluted and guiltless, and that your own souls are pure and without spot, you will despise the doctrines of justification by faith in Christ's blood; renovation by the power of the holy spirit, and salvation by God's sovereign grace; and, consequently will reject every thing in the gospel, which distinguishes it from the religion of nature.

4. There is still another sort of despisers, perhaps more numerous than the former: I mean such as profess to believe the gospel in all its essential doctrines, and yet in their *hearts* and *lives* oppose it.

If, on hearing the characters of despisers as already described, you can acquit yourselves, it is well: But be not high minded. Attend to this

this which has now been mentioned; for by this, I fear, many will be condemned.

You either eſteem the goſpel, or you deſpiſe it: There is no medium: Indifference is contempt. Conſider how you treat the things which you value—¿ Do you treat the goſpel in the ſame manner?

What you eſteem, will be much in your *thoughts*. "Where the treaſure is, there the heart will be." The miſer's thoughts are on his money; the libertine's thoughts are on his pleaſures; a lover's thoughts are on his abſent friend. ¿ How are *your* thoughts employed?—¿ Do they habitually run after Chriſt and his ſalvation, the promiſes of his word, and the bleſſings of his grace? ¿ Do you love to pay him your morning and evening viſits? In the employments of the world, ¿ Do your hearts frequently ſteal away for a ſhort interview with him? ¿ Or, on the contrary, does the world engroſs your ſoul? ¿ Does it lie down and riſe up with you, and poſſeſs you all the day? ¿ Is the ſabbath a wearineſs, God's worſhip a burden, and converſe with his word an irkſome taſk? By thus examining the current of your thoughts, you will learn the ſource from which they ſpring, and the iſſue to which they tend.

"Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth ſpeaketh."

They who are of the world, ſpeak of the world, and the world hears them. They who

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are born from above, have their converſation in heaven. Their true intereſt, beſt friend, ſtrongeſt affections and higheſt hopes are there; and there they find the moſt agreeable ſubjects of diſcourſe. Filled with divine love, and warmed with pious zeal, they reliſh the converſation, which turns on heavenly themes. On proper occaſions they will introduce it; and when it is introduced by others, they will gladly take a part in it. They will ſpeak often one to another, that they may receive and communicate light and heat, and may fan each other's too languid fires into a briſker flame.

There are, indeed, burning lips, which ſometimes accompany a wicked heart. There are ſome fulſome hypocrites, whoſe religion wholly conſiſts in the talk of the lips. Theſe often expoſe religion to contempt by an improper manner of urging it into converſation. Be ye not like them. But then if you feel an averſion to ſerious diſcourſe, and a diſpoſition to divert it, whenever it meets you, ¿ How dwells the love of God in you?

What you eſteem will influence your *practice*. That which you make your great end, will chiefly govern your actions. If your heart is ſet on any particular object, whether it be honour, wealth, or pleaſure, that object you will purſue with an engagedneſs proportionable to the eſtimation which you make of it. Enquire then; ¿ Do the bleſſings of the goſpel command your deſires?

deſires?—¿ Do its promiſes animate your hopes? —¿ Do its threatenings awaken your fears?— ¿ Do its precepts guide your ſteps?—¿ If you are ſtrangers to this holy influence of the goſpel, how can you ſay, you do not deſpiſe it? The world is not viewed with indifference. If this has the higheſt place in your mind, the goſpel is deſpiſed. You cannot ſerve God and mammon. If you hold to the one, you deſpiſe the other.

You are ſolicitous to acquire an *intereſt* in that which you eſteem moſt valuable. Your love of the world prompts your diligence to get a ſhare in it. Your affection for a particular perſon makes you ſtudious to pleaſe him. If you value the goſpel of Chriſt, you will feel a deep concern to obtain the great ſalvation which it reveals. You will be careful to underſtand the terms of it. You will renounce every thing, which you know to be contrary to it. You will count all things but loſt in compariſon with it. You will cut off your right hand, and pluck out your right eye, when it cauſes you to offend. You will not run the hazard of loſing your ſoul, though you might thus gain the whole world. Such a price you will judge infinitely too great for the purchaſe. The world cannot be given back in exchange for the ſoul.

If you value an object, you will be careful to *aſcertain* your intereſt in it. The huſbandman will not purchaſe a farm of him, who can-

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not make him a good title. The merchant will not truſt his wares to thoſe who appear unable to pay him. If one ſhould tell you, your title to your eſtate was precarious, you would not reſt till you had examined it, taken advice upon it, and made it as ſecure as poſſible. If you ſhould hear, that ſome principal debtor was like to fail, you would take meaſures immediately to ſave your debt. If you have the ſame value for the bleſſings of the goſpel, as you have for the intereſts of the world, you will be as prudent and diligent to ſecure them. You will examine yourſelf, whether you are in the faith, and whether Chriſt is formed in you. Every doubt which ariſes in your mind, will give you ſenſible concern, and put you on new enquiry. You will give diligence to the full aſſurance of hope.—¿ How do you find the matter?—¿ Can you live from month to month, and from year to year, careleſs, and unconcerned, without a clear, or even a probable evidence of your title to the great ſalvation of the goſpel? Let me tell you, moſt certainly you deſpiſe it. You would not remain thus indifferent, if any conſiderable worldly intereſt was in the ſame precarious ſituation.

What you chiefly value, you will ſpare no *pains* or *expenſe* to ſecure. To this you will make all other intereſts ſubſervient. Go then, imitate the wiſdom of the huſbandman, who, having found a treaſure hid in a field, ſold all

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that he had, and purchaſed that field—adopt the prudence of the merchant, ſeeking goodly pearls, who, having found one pearl of great price, ſold all his goods to procure it. Seek firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs. Lay up treaſures in heaven. Imagine not that a few tranſient thoughts, cold petitions and lifeleſs endeavours, will entitle you to glory. If your ſeeking riſes no higher than thus, it is but neglect. In the ſalvation of the ſoul there is ſuch an evident and undiſputed ſuperiority to every worldly intereſt, that this indolent ſeeking of the former, while the latter is purſued with ardour, is little better than direct contempt. ¿ And how will you eſcape, if you neglect this great ſalvation?—A ſalvation declared to be great by the price which the Redeemer has paid for the purchaſe of it, by the affectionate importunity with which he has urged your acceptance of it, and by the joy of heaven over thoſe who obtain a ſhare in it.

Once more. What we eſteem, we ordinarily chooſe that *others* ſhould eſteem too. We are pleaſed when they approve our judgment. It grieves us to ſee them deſpiſe the intereſts which we value, and to hear them reproach the friends whom we honour. If we love the goſpel, we ſhall deſire that all men would embrace it. We ſhall openly profeſs our belief of, and attachment to it. If we have, by any means, caſt a ſtain upon it, we ſhall, on conviction, immediate-

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ly wipe it off by a voluntary confeſſion of our error. We ſhall recommend this goſpel to others by a regular attendance on its ordinances, and exemplary obedience to its precepts. When we hear men reproach its heavenly doctrines, or ſee them trample on its ſacred inſtitutions, our hearts will be warmed with holy indignation. We ſhall wiſh to ſee its influence among men more extenſive and powerful, and ſhall gladly contribute our aid to this important purpoſe.

Enquire now, how it is with you, ¿ Can you reſt contented without a profeſſion of the goſpel, and an attendance on its ordinances ? ¿ Can you plead, or patiently hear other plead in defence of licentious opinions, or in excuſe of ungodly practices ? ¿ Can you liſten with ſmiles of pleaſure, or even ſtand with ſilent indifference, when men cavil at the evidences, ridicule the doctrines, and vilify the inſtitutions of the goſpel ? ¿ Can you take a part in, or refrain to bear teſtimony againſt the impious ſlanders, which profane ſinners wantonly throw out againſt it ?—— You certainly deſpiſe it——Beware then, leſt that come upon you, which is ſpoken of in the prophets, Behold ye deſpiſers, and wonder and periſh.

To open and apply this warning, will be the buſineſs of our next diſcourſe.

END OF THE THIRTYFIRST SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XXXII.

The wonderful Destruction of those who despise the Gospel.

ACTS xiii. 40, 41.

Beware therefore lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish: For I work a work in your days; a work which ye will in no wise believe, though a man declare it to you.

IN our preceding discourse we illustrated the character of these despisers, whom the Apostle in our text, so solemnly warns of their danger. We proceed,

II. To shew in what respects, it may be said, They will perish wonderfully.

Here are two things asserted: That destruction awaits contemptuous sinners; and that this destruction, when it comes, will be wonderful.

Firſt, Deſtruction awaits contemptuous ſinners.

The Apoſtle ſays, "If righteouſneſs come by the law, Chriſt is dead in vain." If ſalvation is attainable by the mere ſtrength of nature, and by the works of righteouſneſs which we already have done, or in future ſhall do, in vain is the goſpel plan contrived and revealed. Chriſt came to ſave them who are loſt. If we are not loſt, we need no Saviour: If we are loſt, we can be ſaved only by him. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt, neither is there ſalvation in any other; for there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby they muſt be ſaved.

If this ſcheme was ſo important, that the wiſdom of God would not ſave fallen men without it; ſurely they who deſpiſe and reject it, will, in the juſtice of God, be excluded from the benefit of it.

How far the divine mercy, through a Redeemer, may be extended to heathens who have never known the goſpel, it is not material to enquire. Let it, if you pleaſe, be admitted, that ſome of them will be partakers of God's mercy without a direct and explicit faith in Jeſus Chriſt; yet this is nothing to us, who have actually heard of this divine Saviour, and to whom ſalvation has been offered in his name. If we deſpiſe the redemption, we ſin wilfully, for we have received the knowledge of the truth; and

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for us there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin. You will tell me, the Apoſtle Peter has ſaid, God is no reſpecter of perſons; but, in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteouſneſs is accepted of him."—¿ Will you hence conclude, that there is no need of faith in Chriſt, and ſubmiſſion to his goſpel? This certainly cannot be Peter's meaning; for ¿ Would he preach the goſpel of ſalvation; and, at the ſame time, tell his hearers, that it was of no importance to them? His meaning evidently is, that ſalvation is not *confined* to any particular nation, as the Jews proudly imagined; but that the offer of it is made, without diſtinction, to men of all nations. So this Apoſtle elſewhere expreſſes the matter—" God puts no difference between Jews and Gentiles, purifying their hearts by faith." " He grants to the latter, as well as the former, repentance unto life."

It was upon the occaſion of his being ſent to preach the goſpel to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, that Peter made this reflection, " In every nation he that feareth God is accepted of him." This Cornelius, it is ſaid, " was a devout man, one that feared God, gave much alms, and prayed always." But all his goodneſs did not make it unneceſſary for him to hear and obey the goſpel. A viſion was ſent from heaven to inform him, that his righteouſneſs was not ſufficient; but he muſt look out for farther in-

ſtruction. He was ordered to call for Peter, who ſhould teach him words, by which he might be ſaved.

Some perhaps will aſk, ¿ What if this devout Gentile had never heard of the goſpel, but had died in the exerciſe of that religion, which he had already learned, and hitherto practiſed? In this caſe ¿ What would have become of him? ¿ Would he not have been ſaved?——But this is a queſtion of mere curioſity and ſpeculation. The ſolution of it will no way affect us, who have been actually called to the fellowſhip of the goſpel. God could, no doubt, as eaſily have revealed Chriſt to him by a heavenly meſſenger, as direct him whither to ſend for an apoſtle, who ſhould teach him the way of ſalvation. And if the means of knowledge had not been within his reach, we cannot pretend to ſay, that a Saviour would not have been more immediately diſcovered to him.

But the knowledge of the goſpel certainly was important; and the means of this knowledge were attainable; and Cornelius muſt conduct accordingly. Let me now aſk you; ¿ What if he had diſobeyed the heavenly viſion? ¿ What if he had refuſed to ſend for Peter, or to hear him, when he came, or to comply with his inſtructions when they were given?—¿ What if, inſiſting on the ſufficiency of his own prayers and alms to inſure his acceptance with God; he had exploded the idea of faith in Chriſt, reliance

liance on his grace, baptiſm in his name, and a profeſſion of his goſpel?—¿ Would you then have ſuppoſed, there was any ſincerity in his prayers, any piety in his devotions, any virtue in his alms and works of righteouſneſs? ¿ Do you think, God will be pleaſed with the prayers of thoſe, who refuſe to follow the directions which they pray for? ¿ Do you imagine, he will accept the alms and offerings of thoſe, who deny him that obedience, which is better than ſacrifice?

Reaſon teaches us our obligation to obey the will of God. ¿ How then can men pretend to follow reaſon, when they reject the inſtructions of revelation, and deſpiſe the way of ſalvation which this diſcovers for guilty mortals?

Whatever may be the condition of heathens, who never heard of Chriſt, awful muſt be the fate of thoſe, who, having heard of him, deſpiſe and refuſe the only Lord who bought them.

The goſpel has declared, that "They who believe not, ſhall die in their ſins—that they are condemned already, becauſe they believe not in the name of the only begotten Son of God." If obedience to God is neceſſary to ſalvation, faith in Chriſt muſt be neceſſary; for this is the command of God, "that we believe on him whom he hath ſent."

"When the Lord Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, he will take vengeance, not only on them who

know not God, but alſo on ſuch as obey not the goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he ſhall come to be glorified in his ſaints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

We ſee, then, that deſtruction awaits unbelieving, contemptuous ſinners.

Our text teaches us, *Secondly*, That this deſtruction, when it comes, will be *wonderful*. "Behold, ye deſpiſers, and wonder and periſh."

1. The phraſe may intend, that ſuch ſinners will periſh *unexpectedly*—will meet with *unlooked for* deſtruction—with a puniſhment which they little thought of, and which therefore will fill them with wonder and aſtoniſhment. It is ſaid of Jeruſalem, "Becauſe ſhe remembered not her laſt end, therefore ſhe came down wonderfully."

The ſcripture repreſents the deſtruction of ſinners, in general, as coming upon them by ſurpriſe. This will eſpecially be the fate of thoſe who deſpiſe the goſpel. Their contempt of, and inattention to their ſalvation muſt ariſe either from unfeeling ſtupidity, or blind ſelf flattery. They either think not at all, or, when they hear the warnings of God, they cry, "Peace and ſafety." Therefore ſudden deſtruction comes upon them. If they had any ſenſible convictions of their own guilt and realiſing apprehen-

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sions of the destruction which awaits them, they would prize the gospel beyond all the treasures of the universe. Its gracious invitations and urgent calls would be more welcome to them, than cold water to the thirsty, liberty to captives, or pardon to condemned malefactors. They would listen to them with avidity, and embrace them with ardour and joy.

The greater part of sinners find some way or other to delude themselves into a persuasion, that they shall escape the judgment of God. If they do not expressly deny the truth, yet they studiously evade the force of the divine threatenings. They either banish them from their minds, or view them as respecting times afar off and leaving room for a future repentance; or they flatter themselves, that God will never execute them, or will not execute them so fully as the language of scripture seems to import: Or they indulge a vain, unfounded opinion of their own goodness; or, hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, they resist the impression of every warning, however pertinent and solemn. Destruction, when it falls on such sinners, will take them by terrible surprise.

How will the *atheist*, the *infidel*, the haughty *unbeliever* be amazed, when he finds the awful reality of those eternal scenes of woe, which now he derides, as the sickly dreams of weak and credulous religionists!—How will the stupid *sons of pleasure* be astonished, when in hell they

lift up their eyes, being in torments, and perceive themſelves deeply ſunk in that gulf of miſery, in which there is no conſolation and from which there is no redemption!—What ſevere diſappointment will mortify the proud heart of the *hypocrite*, when, full of the hopes of heaven, he drops into deſtruction, and beholds, in the kingdom of God, thouſands whom he had uncharitably reprobated!—What dreadful ſurpriſe will overwhelm the *preſumptuous* ſinner, who, while he is putting far off the evil day, and relying on the purpoſe of a future repentance, is arreſted in all his guilt and driven away in his wickedneſs!—How will *profane* and *impious* wretches be confounded, who, while they mock at ſin, ſcoff at the judgment to come, and ſport with eternal damnation, are ſeized in the midſt of their impiety, and conſigned to everlaſting burnings!

"Conſider this, ye who forget God, leſt he tear you in pieces; and there be none to deliver."

2. The deſtruction of deſpiſers will be wonderful, as it will *exceed* all preſent *conception*. "There is a ſtrange puniſhment for the workers of iniquity."

Some temporal judgments are ſo great, that they are called ſtrange and marvellous works. Thus ſpeaks the Almighty, by the mouth of his prophet, "For as much as this people have removed their heart far from me, and ſeek to hide their work

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in the dark, and ſay, ¿ Who ſeeth us? therefore will I proceed to do a marvellous work among them, even a marvellous work, and a wonder— Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand; it ſhall be as deſtruction from the Almighty: Therefore ſhall all hands be faint, and every heart ſhall melt, and they ſhall be afraid: Pangs and ſorrows ſhall take hold of them; they ſhall be amazed one at another." ¿ How much more ſtrange and marvellous will be the *future* puniſhment of deſpiſers?—" God will perform a work which they would not believe, though a man ſhould declare it to them." " ¿ Who knows the power of God's anger? As his fear is, ſo is his wrath." There is no paſſion in the human heart, more boundleſs than fear. This is prone to exaggerate evil. It often far exceeds the magnitude of its object. But, in this caſe, it is incapable of exceſs; it falls far ſhort of that, which the wrath of God can do, and which, the ſcripture tells us, it will do.

We cannot conceive the miſery which muſt attend a *total deprivation* of every enjoyment. Many have known the pains of poverty, ſickneſs, captivity and ſlavery. Their pains, however, by a kindly intermixture of bleſſings, have been greatly mitigated and ſoftened. The want of every comfort they never have experienced. But this is what contemptuous ſinners will, one day feel. They have their portion of good things only in this life. Hereafter they will be

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tormented, and will have no reſt day nor night. The rich man, tormented in flames, was denied the ſmall requeſt, that the beggar might be ſent to cool his tongue, by touching it only with his finger dipped in water.

We cannot conceive the greateſt anguiſh of a *ſelf condemning conſcience.*

Some indeed, have known this to a painful degree. Cain under the horrors of guilt, anticipated a puniſhment greater than he could bear. Judas, tormented with the ſtings of remorſe, choſe ſtrangling and death rather than life. If the terrors of conſcience may, even in this world, be ſo intolerable, ¿ What will they be in thoſe regions of darkneſs, thoſe gloomy and diſmal ſhades, where peace and hope can never enter ? There ſinners will meet with nothing to divert their penſive minds. There all the paſt ſcenes of their lives, their contempt of offered mercy, and abuſe of divine grace, all their ungodly deeds, and hard and impious ſpeeches, will come full and freſh to their remembrance and perpetually haunt their guilty ſouls. ¿ Can it be imagined, what keen reflections will pierce them through and through? —¿ What anguiſh will wring their hearts under the corroſions of the worm which never dies ?

Sinners cannot, at preſent, have a full idea of that *poſitive* puniſhment, which awaits them.

Many have known ſevere pains from diſeaſes, wounds and broken limbs. But theſe will give no adequate conception of that torment, which

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the ſcripture expreſſes by the fire which ſhall never be quenched.

The diſtreſs of *total deſpair* is beyond all imagination.

Under our greateſt worldly afflictions, hope ſtands by to conſole and ſuſtain us. Without this, ſome of our troubles would be inſupportable. The apprehenſion of future miſery has driven ſome to the borders of diſtraction; and yet, in their gloomieſt hours hope has ſhed ſome ſparks of light around them. But in the world of miſery, deſpair will be perfect. Every gleam of hope will be excluded. There will be "utter darkneſs," and this rendered more hideous by univerſal wailing and gnaſhing of teeth.

We can form no full and clear conception of *eternity*. This is an object too big for our comprehenſion. We can add, years to years, and ages to ages, until we loſe ourſelves in numbers; but our calculation, after all, ſtops infinitely ſhort of eternity. Yet this is the duration of the future puniſhment of the ungodly. Amazing thought! ¿Who can dwell with devouring fire? ¿Who can dwell with everlaſting burnings?

Behold, ye deſpiſers, and wonder and periſh!

3. This expreſſion teaches, us that the puniſhment of thoſe who deſpiſe the goſpel, will be wonderful, *compared* with that of *other ſinners*. They will be diſtinguiſhed in the world of miſery.

Moſes

Moſes having enumerated the ſingular privileges, which God had vouchſafed to his favoured people, ſays to them, "If ye will not obſerve to do all the words of this law, the Lord will make your plagues wonderful."

The goſpel abounds in warnings of this kind. "If the word ſpoken by angels was ſtedfaſt," ſays the Apoſtle to the Hebrews, "and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward; How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?"—"He who deſpiſed Moſes's law, died without mercy: ¿Of how much ſorer puniſhment ſhall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the ſon of God?"—"If we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth a fearful looking for of judgment."—"If they eſcaped not, who refuſed him that ſpake on earth; much more ſhall not we eſcape, if we turn away from him that ſpeaketh from heaven." The Apoſtle Peter, to guard chriſtians againſt apoſtacy, holds up the ſame warning—"It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteouſneſs, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them." Remarkable are the words of our Saviour to his Apoſtles, when he ſent them forth to preach the kingdom of heaven—"Whoſoever ſhall not receive you, nor hear your words; when ye depart out of that houſe, or city, ſhake off the duſt of your feet; verily I ſay unto you, it ſhall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom

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and Gomorra in the day of judgment, than for that city." These words deserve particular attention.

The people of Sodom and Gomorra are set forth, as an example, suffering the vengeance of fire from heaven. But though they suffered a strange punishment in this world, they are still reserved unto judgment, for a severer doom. And yet their punishment, after all, will be far more tolerable, than the punishment of those who despise the gospel. Our Lord does not say, Whosoever shall practise all the *enormities* of Sodom; but, "whosoever shall not *hear your words*;" it shall be more tolerable for the men of Sodom, than for him. Despisers then will perish wonderfully—in a manner, which they would not believe, though one should declare it to them.

It is time now, that we proceed, as was proposed,

III. To urge and enforce the caution in the text—"Beware, lest this come upon you."

In mercy to our guilty world, God has sent down his Son from heaven, to make the purchase, proclaim the offers, and state the terms of eternal salvation. To us the word of this salvation is sent. The question now proposed is, ¿ Will you accept it ?—

If you will accept the benefit, you must submit to the terms of it. You must repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. You must put off the old man with his deeds,

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be renewed in the ſpirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which is created after the image of God. You muſt renounce all confidence in the fleſh, and place your dependence on the righteouſneſs of the Redeemer, as the ground of your juſtification to eternal life. You muſt form your holy reſolutions in a humble reliance on the grace of the divine ſpirit, without which you can do nothing. In a word, you muſt, with a ſerious and deliberate choice, yield yourſelves to the government of the goſpel of Chriſt. If you will not do this, you deſpiſe his goſpel, and all the bleſſings which it reveals. And whatever may be the condition of thoſe, who have never heard of it, your contempt muſt certainly be followed with conſequences, awful beyond deſcription.

Conſider, I beſeech you, what it is that you deſpiſe. It is a goſpel preached by the Son of God from heaven—confirmed by ſigns, and wonders and divers miracles—preſerved in the world by a merciful providence, and tranſmitted to you by peculiar favour. How worthy then of your thankful acceptation!

To deſpiſe this, is to deſpiſe that pearl of great price, to purchaſe which you ſhould be willing to ſell all that you have. Its doctrines are heavenly—its precepts are pure—its promiſes are precious—it contains the unſearchable riches of Chriſt—treaſures of wiſdom and grace, which angels contemplate with admiration.

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To deſpiſe this, is to deſpiſe God's greateſt gift, even the gift of his own Son, who came to ſeek and to ſave them who were loſt. It is to deſpiſe his diſtinguiſhing goodneſs, in revealing to you the things which are hidden from multitudes of your fellow men, and which many prophets and righteous men have deſired to ſee. It is to deſpiſe your own ſouls, which, in the eſtimation of the Redeemer, are ſo precious, that he gave himſelf up to death for their ſalvation. It is to deſpiſe the ſpirit of grace, which has often ſtrove with you, to awaken you from ſtupidity, recover you from unbelief, and draw you to the Saviour.

Judge now, what muſt be the conſequence of this contempt. Know ye, that your judgment lingers not. The Lord will ſoon ariſe, that he may do his work, his ſtrange work; and may finiſh his act, his ſtrange act. He will ſweep away your refuge of lies, and deſtroy all your hiding places. Now, therefore, be ye not mockers, leſt this which is ſpoken, come upon you.

Enquire, whether you are not to be numbered among thoſe who are called deſpiſers. You do not, perhaps, directly diſbelieve, or profeſſedly reject any eſſential doctrine of the goſpel; much leſs the goſpel itſelf. You receive and acknowledge it as true. ¿ But does this employ your thoughts, engage your attention, influence your heart, and govern your conduct? ¿ Is it your great concern to ſecure the ſalvation, which

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it reveals; and your ſerious enquiry, whether you have any lot or part in this matter? ¿ Do you give all diligence to make your calling and election ſure? ¿ Are you willing to renounce every thing, which appears inconſiſtent with your eternal hopes? ¿ Do you love the word, worſhip and ordinances of God, and delight to attend upon them as the means of ſalvation?—— ¿ Muſt not many confeſs, that they come ſhort of this character? ¿ Yea, that their character is the reverſe of this?——Let me particularly expoſtulate with the young. ¿ Are there not among you, ſome who think little about religion, and the vaſt concerns of eternity, and who devote themſelves wholly to the pleaſures, amuſements and vanities of the world?—¿ Some, who ſpend few of their private hours in converſing with the ſcriptures, maintain no ſecret communion with God, and pay no reverence to the worſhip of the ſanctuary?——¿ Some, who can ſtand out a whole prayer, or ſit out a whole ſermon, and yet ſcarcely know what has been ſpoken; and are more inattentive, when the concerns of their ſalvation are urged, than if they were hearing a novel or romance?—¿ Some, who ſeldom look into themſelves to learn the ſtate of their ſouls, rarely aſk advice on their ſpiritual concerns, and love no converſation leſs, than that which turns on ſerious ſubjects?—¿ Do we ſee you, my young hearers, giving yourſelves up to Jeſus your Lord, and making an open profeſſion of

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his gospel? ¿ Do we see you flocking into his church, and gathering around his table? ¿ Do we see you animating and encouraging one another to piety and good works?——¿ Can it be said, that among you, even among you, there are none who despise the Saviour?

¿ Will a gracious God pour his spirit upon our seed, and his blessing upon our offspring, that they may spring up as grass under the vernal showers, and as willows by the water courses? Then shall we hear one saying, I am the Lord's, and another calling himself by the name of Jacob: We shall see them subscribing with their hands to the Lord, and enrolling themselves among his people: We shall behold them flying unto Jesus as a cloud, and gathering into his house, as doves to their windows.

The gospel is too great, too precious to be despised. It contains the words of eternal life: Hear it, and know it for your good.

Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, lest, while ye look for light, he turn it into darkness and the shadow of death.

THE END OF THE THIRTYSECOND SERMON.

SERMON XXXIII.

The Cure and Conversion of Naaman, the Syrian Leper.

II. KINGS, v. 13.

And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, Wouldst thou not have done it? ¿ How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?

NAAMAN, the chief commander of the Syrian army, a man of great reputation in his country, and in high estimation with his king, was grievously afflicted with the leprosy; a disease, which seemed in its nature to be incurable, and which, by its progress in the present case, threatened speedy death. On the advice of a Hebrew girl, who was a servant in his family, the Syrian general took a journey into the land

land of Iſrael, hoping, from her information, to receive a cure by the power and prayers of the prophet Eliſha. He came, with horſes and chariots and a train of attendants, to the prophet's houſe, and waited at the gate, until his perſon and buſineſs were made known, expecting that the man of God would ſoon appear, and with great ſolemnity perform the cure. But the prophet only ſent to him a ſervant, with this ſimple preſcription, "Go, waſh ſeven times in Jordan, and thy fleſh ſhall come again to thee, and thou ſhalt be clean." The general thinking his dignity contemned, and his misfortune inſulted by a ridiculous preſcription indignantly replied, "Behold, I thought, he will ſurely come out to me, and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and ſtrike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. ¿ Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damaſcus, better than all the waters of Iſrael? ¿ May I not waſh in them and be clean?"—"So he turned and went away in a rage." His ſervants, reluctant to think that their hopes ſhould be fruſtrated by his paſſionate reſolution, expoſtulated with him, in the words, which have juſt been read. "My father, if the prophet had bidden thee do ſome great thing, Wouldſt thou not have done it? ¿ How much rather then, when he ſaith to thee, Waſh and be clean?"

Their judicious expoſtulation recalled his reaſon. He applied the remedy, and obtained a

cure. He immediately returned to the prophet, acknowledged the Supreme God, and profeſſed his reſolution to worſhip, from that time, no other deity, but the God of Iſrael.

This ſtory will afford us ſeveral uſeful inſtructions.

I. We ſee the dangerous conſequences of a haſty judgment in matters of importance.

This had like to have proved fatal to Naaman. It has often proved fatal to others. He conducted with much diſcretion, until he had heard the prophet's advice. At this critical moment his prudence deſerted him. He turned away in anger; and, if his paſſion had continued, he would have been a leper to the day of his death. From his raſhneſs and precipitance, let others learn wiſdom and caution.

"Judge not according to the appearance," ſays our divine Lord, "but judge righteous judgment."

Let this rule guide your enquiries concerning the doctrines of religion. Reject not a doctrine, becauſe it contradicts an opinion, which once you have formed, or oppoſes a deſign which now you are purſuing; but examine it coolly, and decide upon it impartially. If it appears, to be a doctrine agreeable to reaſon, founded in ſcripture, and tending to virtue, admit it as divine, however diverſe it may be from your former conceptions, or preſent inclinations.

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When you meet with an unexpected reproof, ſuffer not your reſentments to riſe; but hear it calmly and apply it ſeriouſly. If you are not too good to offend, think not yourſelf too great to be admoniſhed. "Let the righteous ſmite you; it will be a kindneſs: Let him reprove you; it will be an excellent oil, which ſhall not break your head." If you proudly preſume that you have done no wrong, or raſhly deem him your enemy who reminds you of the wrong you have done, you are hardly capable of amendment. "Seeſt thou a man wiſe in his own conceit;—there is more hope of a fool, than of him."

In the progreſs of the religious life, difficulties, unforeſeen and unthought of, will probably occur. But how great ſoever they may be, hold on your way with conſtancy. You have felt a conviction of the importance of religion, and formed a reſolution in its favour. You now attend on the appointed means of grace—you refrain from ſome of your paſt guilty practices—you ſeek God's mercy with an earneſtneſs, which is new and unexperienced. Hopeful beginnings theſe. "Then ſhall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord." When the leper of Syria came and waited at Eliſha's door, there was a fair proſpect of his recovery. Do not like him turn back in diſguſt. Perhaps you will not find the eaſy ſucceſs, which you expected. Still wait on God, and maintain your

hope. Say not, with the hypocrites of old, "It is vain to ſerve the Lord; and, ¿What profit is it, that we walk mournfully before him?" he has not ſaid to you, "Seek me in vain."

¿What a hopeful diſpoſition appeared in the young ruler mentioned by the evangeliſts? He came to Chriſt, and enquired, how he ſhould enter into life. He treated his divine inſtructor with reverence. The advice firſt given him he received with approbation, profeſſed a compliance, and aſked, What more was to be done? Alas! ¿How many are there, who never appear to go as far in religion as he did? But ſtill, unhappy youth! he failed. When he heard, that a temper to renounce the world for heaven, was neceſſary to complete the religious character, he went away; not indeed, like the Syrian in a rage; but in ſorrow, that religion would not comport with the love of riches.

Work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling: Wait on God, and he will ſtrengthen your heart. Look well to yourſelves, that ye loſe not the things, which have been wrought, but that ye receive a full reward.

II. We are here taught, that we are not to make our own humour the ſtandard by which to form our judgment in matters of divine appointment.

This was Naaman's fault. If the prophet had come out to him, and, with the affected ſolemnity of a heathen inchanter, had invoked his God,

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and ſtruck his hand over the diſtempered part, the leper would have expected a cure. But the ſimple advice to waſh in Jordan, appeared too ridiculous to be regarded. His ſervants prudently ſuggeſt to him, that this was the advice of an acknowledged *prophet*; and the propriety of it ought not to be diſputed, even though it had been attended with the greateſt difficulty.

The temper of Naaman has often appeared in others.

The Jews groaned for deliverance from Egypt; and deliverance was granted. But becauſe they were not led right on, by the ſhorteſt paſſage, to Canaan, they murmured againſt Moſes, and againſt God, and wiſhed themſelves in their former bondage.

At the time of Chriſt's appearance, the people were in earneſt expectation of their Meſſiah; but, becauſe he appeared in a form different from that which their own fancy had deſcribed, they rejected him as an impoſtor; nor could they by all his reaſoning and miracles, be convinced, that they had miſunderſtood the prophets.

Among the Gentiles, Chriſt crucified for the ſalvation of men was fooliſhneſs; ¿ For how ſhould he ſave others, who himſelf ſuffered as a criminal? The plain and artleſs manner in which the apoſtles preached, diſguſted their pride. They imagined, it would have been far

more agreeable to the wiſdom of God to employ, in reforming the world, ſome acute philoſopher and ſubtile diſputer. Thus, carried away with their own humour and prejudice, many deſpiſed the goſpel of ſalvation.

In the chriſtian world, the religion of Jeſus, which, in its original inſtitution, is rational and pure, has been cruelly tortured and deformed by the vain conceits of men. For ſome it is too ſimple, and they think it would be much beautified and improved by the addition of a few more ceremonies. Others can hardly be reconciled to the few ceremonies which really belong to it. The precept concerning the ſabbath, they chooſe to throw among the obſolete rites of Judaiſm; for they ſee no reaſon for receſs from labour, or application to the duties of piety, on one day more than another. They apprehend no advantage from a ſtated attendance on publick worſhip; for they can pray, and read the Bible, in private; and, if more is neceſſary, they can ſupply themſelves with books well adapted to piety. They conceive not, what good it can do to apply a little water to a perſon's body, eſpecially to the body of a child, with the invocation of a ſacred name. The child knows not what is done; much leſs for what end it is done. ¿ Is ſalvation at all connected with ſuch ceremonies?—They imagine there can be no real benefit in eating bread and drinking wine for the remembrance of Chriſt: ¿ May he not as well be remembered

remembered by reading the hiſtory of his life and death?——

By cavils, like theſe, many ſatisfy themſelves in the neglect of the plaineſt inſtitutions of the goſpel; juſt as the Syrian leper, when he was ordered to waſh in Jordan, objected, "¿ Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damaſcus, better than all the waters of Iſrael?—¿ May I not waſh in them and be clean?

The ſame humour often oppoſes the *doctrines*, as well as inſtitutions of God. Some haſtily reject every doctrine, which contradicts their own temper and practice; as if nothing could be true, but what will juſtify them. Some pronounce every doctrine falſe or uſeleſs, which comes not within their comprehenſion; as if a doctrine too grand for the human mind to graſp, might not be ſo far underſtood, as to influence an honeſt heart. Some make light of every thing in ſcripture, for which they cannot aſſign a reaſon; as if there could be no reaſons for God's appointments, but what lie obvious to them. So Naaman rejected Eliſha's advice, becauſe he could ſee no reaſon, why the waters of Jordan ſhould be more efficacious in the leproſy, than thoſe of any other river.

His ſervants have ſuggeſted the proper temper in ſuch caſes, which is ſubmiſſion to the authority of God. A *prophet* had bidden him waſh in Jordan.

When a revelation is propoſed to us, we are to examine its evidence; and with ſuch evi-

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dence as appears rationally conclusive we are to rest satisfied. Whatever difficulties may arise from the imperfection of human reason, these should not be considered as invalidating positive proof. Settled in the full belief of revelation, we are to receive, as divine, every doctrine and precept which we find in it, and to govern our lives by them.

This leads us to another observation;

III. If we expect success in any great and good design, we must humbly follow the instructions of God. When Naaman washed in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God, his flesh came again, and he was clean.

God could have cleansed this leper by one washing as well as seven, or without sending him to Jordan at all. But he saw fit to make this prescription, and Naaman must obey.

He who made the earth, and placed us upon it, could command it to yield us a spontaneous supply. But then, ¿ What would be the use of those active powers, which he has given us? If we were supported, like trees and plants, merely by a mechanical nutrition, there would be a manifest incongruity in the works of God. Our powers would be unemployed; we should sink into thoughtless ingratitude: We should forget our benefactor and despise his benefits.

In common life, we see our dependance on God, and the importance of applying the powers which we possess. The case is the same in the

the religious life. By grace we are ſaved; and, by attendance on means, we obtain this grace. You will aſk, "¿ Cannot God renew the hearts of ſinners without their application of means?"—Grant that he can: Yet, ſince he has preſcribed this, they are to expect his grace only in this way.

"¿ But will God hear the prayers of the unconverted?" ¿ Why not?—He has directed them to enquire of him, and he has not ſaid to them, "Seek ye me in vain." You will ſay, "There is no real holineſs in their prayers; they are made only from *natural* principles." It is granted: But God hears the ravens when they cry. ¿ May he not hear the voice of nature in rational, as well as in animal creatures?

When Iſrael, in their affliction, ſought God, and returned and enquired early after him, he, being full of compaſſion, ſuſpended their deſtruction, and prolonged their ſpace of repentance, though their heart was not right with him, and they were not ſtedfaſt in his covenant.

You will aſk, ¿ "What peculiar benefit can ariſe from attending on publick inſtitutions? ¿ Why may we not read and meditate, with as much profit, in private?"—Do the latter, and leave not the former undone.

"¿But is God dependent on a particular ſet of means?" If he is not dependent, yet you are. And if, under pretence of exalting his free and ſovereign grace, you neglect the inſtituted means

of

of religion, you mock the grace which you profeſs to magnify.

To proceed;

IV. If, in a caſe of importance, we would uſe difficult and doubtful means, rather than abandon the object in view, much more ſhould we apply cheap and eaſy means, when we have good hope of ſucceſs.

Naaman's caſe was extremely unhappy. Afflicted with an increaſing diſeaſe, for which no remedy was known, he had nothing to expect but death. ¿ What would he not give, to obtain a cure ?

He had taken a journey to the land of Iſrael. He had brought with him ten changes of raiment, as many talents of ſilver, and ſix thouſand pieces of gold, as a preſent to the man, who ſhould heal him. A mighty preſent; but not greater than he would give for his health. Beſides this; had the prophet preſcribed the moſt painful operations and expenſive medicines, Naaman would have ſubmitted to them, even without the poſitive aſſurance of a cure. ¿ How much more reaſonable was it, that he ſhould go and waſh in Jordan, when he had a promiſe from the man of God, that his fleſh ſhould come again and he ſhould be clean?

This argument his ſervants urged with great propriety, and it had its effect. To the caſe of ſinners it may be applied with ſuperior force.

Convinced

Convinced of your guilty ſtate, let this be your ſerious enquiry; "¿ What muſt we do to be ſaved?" Your ſalvation indeed comes from God. But it comes only in a way of repentance. Without this, it will be as abſurd to expect the ſalvation of the goſpel, as for Naaman to have hoped for a cure, while he refuſed the waters of Jordan. When ſo vaſt an object is depending, if God had bidden you to do ſome great thing, ¿ Would you not have done it? ¿ How much rather, when he ſays to you, "Repent and be ſaved?"

Had a life of the moſt painful ſelf denial been made the condition of your eternal happineſs, reaſon would dictate a compliance with it. How much more ought you to comply with the terms, which are in fact propoſed! Theſe are all mild and gracious. They are attended with no arbitrary mortifications. The religion, which prepares you for heaven, contributes to your happineſs here. It will relieve you from the vexation of irregular paſſions, and the torments of conſcious guilt. It will reclaim you from the way of tranſgreſſors, which is hard, and direct your feet in paths of pleaſantneſs and peace. It will give order to your ſoul, and tranquillity to your conſcience. It will open to you the moſt delightful proſpects, and fill you with joyful hopes. It cannot, indeed, ſecure you from the outward troubles which reſult from a ſtate of mortality; but

but it will yield you the firmeſt ſupport, and the ſweeteſt conſolation under them.

If religion deprived you of all the bleſſings, and involved you in all the evils of the preſent world; yet, ſince it is neceſſary to the happineſs of the next, it ſurely ought to be your choice: ¿ How much more when it unites the intereſts of both worlds?

Farther. Though God had only preſcribed the means, and ſtated the terms of ſalvation, you ought, in a caſe of ſuch mighty importance, to attend to them: ¿ How much more when a *promiſe* is annexed? If a patient, in dangerous ſickneſs, ſhould refuſe all medicines, becauſe their ſucceſs was uncertain, we ſhould conclude that his diſtemper had diſturbed his reaſon. When life is depending, rather than ſubmit to certain death we try precarious remedies.

The Ninevites, being warned of approaching deſtruction, cried mightily unto God, and turned from their evil ways; "for," ſaid they, "¿ Who can tell, if God will turn from his fierce anger, that we periſh not?" Had you no more ground of hope than they, yet you ought, like them, to apply the means of preſervation: ¿ How much more, when God has aſſured you, that whoſo confeſſeth and forſaketh his ſins ſhall find mercy?

Naaman's hope was reaſonable. It ſtood, however, on more precarious ground than yours.

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He had heard of the prophet Eliſha, and of great things which he had done. But his firſt information came from a Hebrew child in his family. If Eliſha was endued with extraordinary powers, it appeared not, how far theſe powers extended. He never had been known, either by water, or any other means, to heal a leper, though there were, among his own countrymen, patients enough, on whom he might have tried his power. Theſe circumſtances naturally rendered doubtful the iſſue of the propoſed expedient. His ſervants, however, judged it wiſe to make a trial; and they judged right.

Your hopes reſt on firmer ground. You receive your directions from the ſacred ſcriptures, which are proved, by the higheſt evidence, to be the word of God. The means preſcribed in your caſe, you know, come from divine authority. In the uſe of them many have found ſucceſs. You are not the firſt who have been adviſed to apply them. They have, in every age, been bleſſed to the ſalvation of thouſands. You are not called to make a doubtful experiment: But to uſe an approved remedy. ¿ What think you?—¿ Did Naaman's ſervants reaſon well?—Say then, ¿ What can excuſe your negligence, to whom their reaſoning more ſtrongly applies?

V. There is one thing more to be remarked in this ſtory; namely, the benefits which Naaman received by his compliance with the good advice of his ſervants. Theſe were reſtoration to health, and converſion to the truth. "Then

he

he went and dipped himſelf ſeven times in Jordan, according to the ſaying of the man of God, and his fleſh came again, as the fleſh of a child."

Though he was a man of high ſpirits and haſty paſſion, there ſeems to have been a noble honeſty in his diſpoſition. He could take advice from his ſervants; and feel the force of an argument, even when it condemned himſelf.

They addreſſed him with tokens of reſpect. They did not bluntly rebuke him, but modeſtly expoſtulated with him. To reprove the faults and expoſe the errors of our friends—of our ſuperiors—eſpecially, if they be men of haſty tempers, is a delicate office. We muſt approach them cautiouſly, and touch them ſoftly. We muſt chooſe out acceptable words; for theſe are the moſt forceable. It is better gently to inſinuate, than roughly to obtrude our advice. "A word fitly ſpoken is like apples of gold in pictures of ſilver."

We ſhould always be open to the counſel of our friends; hear it with calmneſs, when it is offered; examine it with fairneſs, when we have heard it; and follow it as far as we are convinced it is juſt. He who feels too ſelf important to be adviſed to his duty, is hardly capable of being reclaimed from his faults. A paſſionate temper expoſes men to a thouſand miſchiefs. This temper, joined with pride, obſtinacy and ignorance, is fatal. Naaman repented of his raſhneſs. He tried the remedy, and received a cure.

This

This was not the greateſt benefit which he found in complying with the prophet's advice. Convinced by his miraculous cure, that Jehovah was the only true God, he returned to the man of God, and ſaid, "Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Iſrael; I will henceforth offer neither burnt offering, nor ſacrifice unto any other gods but the Lord."

By this journey to the land of Iſrael, he obtained a cure of his idolatry, as well as of his leproſy. Surely he did not regret his labour.

Men's intereſt often turns on circumſtances, which ſeem trivial, and from which they had little expectation. Naaman brought with him his ſervants, not for counſel, but attendance. But their advice was the occaſion of his being healed of his diſeaſe, and reclaimed from his error. Had they not interpoſed, he would probably have returned home in his paſſion, and carried his leproſy and idolatry with him. We may often ſee the wiſdom and goodneſs of providence, in things, which, at firſt view, ſeemed ſmall and inconſiderable. Our life, our virtue, our deliverance from danger, and our ſecurity from temptation, may depend on occurrences, which ſeem to us quite indifferent. God can overrule the ſmalleſt circumſtances to the moſt important iſſue.

It is a mighty advantage to have thoſe about us, who have more virtue and diſcretion than

ourſelves. He who walks with wiſe men, will be wiſe.

The leproſy of Naaman's body was the occaſion which brought him to the knowledge and belief of the true religion. The greateſt evils, which we ſuffer in life, may, in the hand of providence, become the means of our greateſt good. This conſideration ſhould teach us ſubmiſſion to the ways of God. Affliction, much oftener than proſperity, is the means of virtue. By captivity Manaſſeh was awakened to repentance. By a famine the prodigal was brought to himſelf. Moſt men, who have been reclaimed from a vicious life, may, I believe, date the firſt beginning of ſerious conſideration from a dangerous ſickneſs, a grievous diſappointment, the death of an intimate friend, or ſome other painful trial. Many have ſeen cauſe to bleſs God for the things, which once they thought were againſt them.

It may ſeem perhaps, from the following part of this ſtory, that Naaman was but a partial convert to the worſhip of God. He ſays to the prophet, "In this thing the Lord pardon thy ſervant, that when my maſter goeth into the houſe of Rimmon to worſhip there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myſelf in the houſe of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy ſervant in this thing." Some have, from hence, ſuppoſed, that he intended ſtill to worſhip the gods of his country, leſt he ſhould forfeit his high office under

der the king. But the prophet's anſwer, favours not this ſuppoſition. He ſays, "Go in peace."

Naaman had reſolved to worſhip no other god, but the Lord; and as an open teſtimony of his faith in him, to build him an altar in Damaſcus, with materials carried from the land of Iſrael. His office, however, under the king, required his attendance in the temple of Rimmon, whenever his maſter went thither to worſhip; and when the king, leaning on his ſhoulder, ſhould bow in the temple he muſt unavoidably bow with him. Now he enquires of the prophet, whether ſuch an involuntary action, after he had given publick proof of his faith in the God of Iſrael, would be matter of offence. He ſeems to hope, it might be diſpenſed with, and he need not reſign his office. The prophet ſays, "Go in peace." Civil reſpect to your king is not inconſiſtent with the worſhip of God.

True religion is pure and uncorrupt. It is directed to the one ſupreme God. It conſiſts in loving and ſerving him with an undivided heart. But it diſſolves not our natural, or civil relations nor cancels the obligations which reſult from them: It only requires us to perform the duties of theſe relations with ſimplicity and ſincerity, as to God, and not men. If Naaman in order to retain his office, had determined to worſhip the idols of his country, vain and unacceptable would have been his ſacrifices to the God of Iſrael. But if he made open declaration of his

abhorrence of the Syrian idolatry, and only attended on the king in compliance with the civil duties of his ſtation, the prophet ſignifies, that he might be accepted.

New converts are to be treated with tenderneſs. Too rigorous impoſitions may diſcourage hopeful beginnings. Our Saviour would not put new wine into old bottles, leſt the bottles ſhould burſt, and the wine be ſpilled.

The converſion of ſo reſpectable an officer in the Syrian nation might produce happy conſequences to others. The altar which he erected, and the worſhip which he paid, in his own country, to the one ſupreme God, might be the occaſion of reclaiming many from their idolatry. Great and important effects are often produced from ſmall beginnings. The reformation of one ſinner may eventually prove the ſalvation of thouſands. Paul obtained mercy, that in him Chriſt might ſhew forth all long ſuffering for a pattern to them, who ſhould afterward believe to life everlaſting.

God has wonderful ways in bringing about his merciful purpoſes to men. He often makes a ſmall circumſtance productive of mighty events, and turns a worldly calamity into an eternal bleſſing. We ſhould learn to regard his hand in all our changes, to truſt his wiſdom in all our perplexities, to trace the ways of his providence in their wonderful connexions, to improve our worldly afflictions for the advancement of religion

ion in our hearts, and to exhibit before men such a bright example of good works, that they also may glorify God.

END OF THE THIRTYTHIRD SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XXXIV.

The first Fruits unto Christ.

ROMANS, xvi. v.

Salute my well beloved Epenetus, who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ.

PAUL in his salutations to his christian friends, mentions something in the character of almost every one, as a ground and reason of his affection and esteem. What he particularly commends in this Epenetus is, that *he was the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ.* Some copies read, the first fruits of *Asia*, which reading some think should be preferred, because the Apostle says, 1 Cor. xvi, 15. that the *house of Stephanas* was the first fruits of *Achaia.* But perhaps *Epenetus* might be the first *person*, and the household of *Stephanas* the first *family*, in Achaia, which openly embraced the gospel. On this

supposition

ſuppoſition the paſſages, as they ſtand, are fully reconciled.

The firſt fruits under the law, were an offering made to God of part of the harveſt in acknowledgment of his bounty. This offering was made of the firſt ripe fruits, and before the harveſt was begun. In alluſion to this offering, Jeſus Chriſt is called, "the firſt fruits of them that ſlept," becauſe he was the firſtborn from the dead, and his reſurrection is an earneſt and pledge of the reſurrection of believers.

The ſanctifying and comforting influences of the ſpirit, which are now vouchſafed to chriſtians, are called *the firſt fruits of the Spirit*. For as the firſt fruits were to the Jews pledges of the enſuing harveſt, ſo the graces of the Spirit are tokens and earneſts of heavenly happineſs.

The Apoſtle James ſays, "God of his own will hath begotten us by the word of truth, that we ſhould be a kind of firſt fruits of his creatures:" Or that we ſhould be conſecrated to his ſervice; as the firſt fruits of harveſt were dedicated to him, in acknowledgment that all was his gift.

In the fourteenth chapter of the Revelation, they who were redeemed from among men; they who in times of general corruption, had not defiled themſelves, but preſerved their purity; they who had followed the Lamb whither ſoever he went, are called "the firſt fruits unto God and the Lamb." Theſe, like the firſtborn and firſt fruits under the law, were dedicated to

God; and their fidelity was an earneſt of a more plentiful acceſſion to the church of God in future times.

By a like alluſion to the offering, which preceded the harveſt, the Apoſtle calls the firſt converts to the faith of Chriſt in a particular place, the firſt fruits of that place unto Chriſt. They reſembled the firſt fruits, not only in their early dedication of themſelves to Chriſt, but alſo as their converſion was a mean and an earneſt of a ſucceeding harveſt there. You ſee then the ſpecial reaſon why Paul ſalutes Epenetus in thoſe terms.

Now conſider this man, dwelling in the midſt of heathens and idolaters, ſurrounded with daily examples of vice and ſuperſtition, and long accuſtomed to the manners of the world; but, on the preaching of an Apoſtle of Chriſt, renouncing his former vices and errors; coming out from among a corrupt and idolatrous multitude; ſtanding forth alone in the profeſſion of the truth and the reformation of his life; and, by his example, and converſation, inviting his fellow citizens to turn from their vanities and ſerve the living God; and will you not admire his integrity, zeal and fortitude—His openneſs to conviction—The ſtrength of his faith in Chriſt, and the benevolence of his heart toward thoſe around him? Viewing Epenetus in this light, Will you wonder, that Paul remembers him in his chriſtian ſalutations; calls him his beloved friend; and celebrates his virtue as *the firſt fruits of Achaia unto Chriſt?* In what an amiable

amiable and important light does he ſtand? What higher and nobler character could be given of him, than the Apoſtle has expreſſed in theſe few words?

We are here naturally led to this remark, *that forwardneſs in religion is a character highly commendable in the ſight of Jeſus Chriſt.* So our apoſtle eſteemed it. He therefore ever ſpeaks in terms of peculiar honor and affection, concerning thoſe who firſt embraced the goſpel in a particular place; who were in Chriſt before him; who ran great hazards in the cauſe of truth; who had been his helpers in the work of Chriſt; and who had labored much in the Lord.

Let us firſt ſhew how a forwardneſs in religion may diſcover itſelf. And then diſplay the excellency and commendableneſs of this diſpoſition.

We will firſt conſider the diſpoſition here commended in Epenetus: He was the *firſt fruits to Chriſt.* He diſtinguiſhed himſelf by a promptitude, zeal and forwardneſs in the cauſe of the goſpel.

There is, in ſome perſons, a certain vanity—a ſelf importance, which makes them forget their proper place, and urges them to take the lead in every matter in which they mean to bear a part. They aſſume haughty airs, and dictatorial language; feel ſuperior to advice, and competent to preſcribe to every man. They are ſwift to ſpeak on every ſubject, and ſlow to hear on

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any. They are bold and confident in their own opinions; fixed and obſtinate in their own reſolutions; and liberal in their cenſures of all who diſſent from them.

This is *forwardneſs* indeed; but not forwardneſs in *religion*. True religion is always attended with humility; with ſober thoughts of ourſelves; with a charitable diſpoſition to others; with a modeſt diſtruſt of our own wiſdom, ſtrength, and virtue; and with a ready attention to the inſtructions and counſels of thoſe, who may be our helpers in Chriſt Jeſus. Paul, though the chief of the Apoſtles, thankfully accepted aſſiſtance in his work from private chriſtians; even from thoſe who had been converted by his miniſtry.

While we aim to be forward in religion, let us avoid every thing that ſavours of pride and oſtentation. This, ſo far as it prevails, is inconſiſtent with religion in ourſelves, and ſo far as it appears, will defeat our endeavours to promote religion among others. Particularly,

1. *Early religion* may be called the firſt fruits unto Chriſt. It diſcovers an amiable forwardneſs to ſerve him. Epenetus was not called by the goſpel in his youth: He enjoyed not thoſe early advantages, which many now enjoy. But it ſeems probable, that he embraced the firſt opportunity to hear the goſpel, and accepted the firſt invitation to devote himſelf to Chriſt. His religion had all the virtue and excellency of early religion. He gave to Chriſt the firſt fruits,

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if not of life itself, yet of that part of life in which he was favoured with the heavenly call.

All have now this call in their youth. They, who are most forward and seasonable in obeying it, are the first fruits to Christ. They give him their purest and best time, as an earnest that all shall be consecrated to him.

You, who are young, are from the very circumstance of your age, tempted to delay the work of religion. Many of you appear to live with great indifference to it. By your example you embolden one another in the dangerous neglect. Now, if any of you, awakened to a sense of your danger, should renounce the vanities of your youth, and dedicate yourselves to the service of your redeemer, you would be to him the first fruits among your fellows. And who knows, what a harvest might ensue? Your example might encourage others; your early zeal might provoke many. But still you would be entitled to the distinction of being in Christ before them.

2. Forwardness in religion will appear in an *open profession* of it, and a diligent attendance on the means of it.

There may be a profession of religion, when the heart is not engaged in it. But a zeal for religion, without a profession, cannot be supposed; for a profession is not only injoined as a duty in itself, but prescribed as a mean of promoting religion among others. The man who really believes the gospel of Christ, and feels the vast importance of it, will openly declare

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before men the views and apprehenſions, which he entertains of it. The apoſtle ſays, "I am not aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt, for it is the power of God to ſalvation to every one that believes." The believer will wiſh the prevalence of religion among others. That a diſpenſation, on which the eternal happineſs of guilty men ſo eſſentially depends, ſhould be generally neglected and diſregarded, is a thought which deeply wounds the benevolent feelings of his ſoul. As he deſires that others ſhould have the ſame ſentiments of it with him, ſo he openly avows his regard to it; and by a diligent attendance on the inſtituted ordinances of it, invites all to come and ſeek an acquaintance with it, and ſhare in its divine and heavenly bleſſings.

3. One who is forward in religion, will maintain the profeſſion and practice of it, though he ſhould thus render himſelf *ſingular*.

Epenetus profeſſed the religion of the goſpel, when all around him were in a different ſentiment and practice. He was the firſt, among all the people in Achaia, to ſtand forth in its cauſe. Stephanas was the firſt there, who dedicated his whole family to Chriſt, and ſet up the worſhip of God in his houſe. ¿ What a noble zeal and fortitude they diſcovered, in adventuring to be ſingular in the faith and obedience of the goſpel?

The chriſtian, who is forward and zealous in religion, will profeſs it, though his neighbours treat it with indifference. He will maintain the

worſhip

worſhip of God in his family, though all around him deſpiſe and even ridicule his ſtrict and conſcientious devotion. The cavillers at family worſhip, he anſwers in the language of the captain of Iſrael, "If it ſeem evil to you to ſerve the Lord, chuſe you this day whom you *will* ſerve; but as for me and my houſe, *we* will ſerve the Lord."

He will attend on the inſtituted ordinances of God's houſe, and require the attendance of his children with him, though the manner of others is to forſake the aſſembling of themſelves together.

He will have no fellowſhip with the unfruitful works of darkneſs, but will rather reprove them. He will be the companion of them who fear God, and will ſay to evil doers, depart from me, though they may think it ſtrange that he runs not with them to the ſame exceſs of riot, ſpeaking evil of him.

He will not be conformed to this world; but, being transformed by the renewing of his mind, he proves what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

In matters of a worldly nature, he will uſe great condeſcenſion for the ſake of peace. But in religion he will be governed, not by the opinions and cuſtoms of the world, but by the plain inſtructions of God's word. He is peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be entreated; but he is firſt pure. He reckons it a ſmall thing to be judged of man's judgment, ſince he who will judge him is the Lord. And though he is diſpoſed, in mat-

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ters of indifference, to pleaſe men for their good to edification, yet he will not pleaſe them with the hazard of offending God. An aim to pleaſe God is the grand principle that governs him in all his converſation. This leads me to ſay,

4. Forwardneſs in religion muſt appear in a zeal for *great eſſential* things.

There are many who are forward in little matters; zealous for or againſt ſpeculative opinions, outward forms, and the peculiar tenets and uſages which diſcriminate particular ſects. But this is not forwardneſs in religion; it is only forwardneſs in a party deſign. This is not to offer to Chriſt the firſt fruits of obedience. It is rather to offer him the ſtraw and chaff, inſtead of the full laden ſheaf.

The chriſtian, forward in religion, principally regards the ſubſtantial and weighty matters of the goſpel. He is zealous to repent and to maintain good works. He is fervent in ſpirit, ſerving the Lord. He abounds in the proper fruits of the ſpirit, righteouſneſs, goodneſs and truth. His heart is ſet in him againſt ſin of every kind, eſpecially againſt his own ſins; and engaged in the great and unqueſtionable duties of the goſpel. He gives diligence to make his calling and election ſure, by continual improvements in all the graces of the chriſtian temper. He is ſolicitous to abound in them, that he may never fall, but an entrance may be miniſtered to him abundantly into the kingdom of Chriſt.

5. One

5. One who is forward in religion, labours to promote it *among others.*

When Paul calls his beloved Epenetus the firſt fruits of Achaia to Chriſt, he intimates that a rich harveſt followed; for the firſt fruits imply a following harveſt. This forward chriſtian doubtleſs aſſiſted Paul in his work, and contributed his aid in the culture of the ſoil, and in the production and collection of the crop. His converſion to the faith, and his exemplary converſation, were among the means which gave the goſpel a ſucceſsful ſpread in Achaia.

The forward chriſtian will principally attend to the ſtate of religion in his own ſoul. He will not neglect his own vineyard, to keep the vineyards of his brethren. He will not be officious to wipe the mote out of his brother's eye, while a beam is in his own. He will not ſpend his zeal in cenſuring the ſins of others, and indulge iniquity in his own heart. His firſt care is to cleanſe himſelf from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs in the fear of God.

He next attends to the ſtate of religion in his family. He commands his children and his houſehold after him to keep the way of the Lord. He is watchful over their manners, that he may reſtrain them from making themſelves vile, and from rendering others ſo by their vile example.

But his influence is not confined within the walls of his own dwelling; it extends to thoſe around. He laments the prevalence of iniquity, and

and the decline of religion, wherever he obſerves it. He prays that God would revive his work, and ſtudies how he may be inſtrumental in advancing it.

He readily concurs in any reaſonable meaſures for this purpoſe. As the preaching of the goſpel is an inſtituted mean of religion, he honours it by his attendance, gives credit to it by his example, and, when there is opportunity, ſeconds it by his advice and reproof.

They who fear God will ſpeak often one to another in a way of conſultation, what they ought to do for the Lord, when men make void his ſtatutes. If they ſee a proper occaſion, they will cheerfully impart their ſubſtance for the relief of their neceſſitous brethren, for the ſupport of Chriſt's cauſe, and for the aſſiſtance of ſuch as are under any peculiar diſadvantages with reſpect to religion. Such was the zeal of the primitive chriſtians. The houſe of Stephanas, which was the firſt fruits of Achaia, addicted themſelves to the miniſtry of the ſaints. Paul commends to the Corinthians the forwardneſs of the chriſtians in Macedonia, whoſe deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality; and who, even beyond their power, were willing of themſelves, without ſolicitation, to contribute to the relief of their diſtreſſed brethren in Judea. And the forwardneſs of the Corinthians he alſo commends in the following terms—"It is ſuperfluous for me to write to you concerning the miniſtering to the ſaints; for I know the forwardneſs

wardneſs of your mind, for which I boaſt of you to them of Macedonia—and your zeal hath provoked very many."

The forwardneſs of religious zeal among chriſtians can be diſplayed in nothing more ſubſtantially, than in their liberal minds toward each other.

6. The forward chriſtian aſpires to *greater eminence* in religion. He is not ſatisfied with what he is, nor contented with what he has done: He would grow in grace, and abound ſtill more in all the fruits of righteouſneſs. He reckons not himſelf to be already perfect; but forgetting the things which are behind, he reaches forward to the things which are before, and preſſes toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Chriſt. The ſuperior example of others humbles him for his defects, and animates his endeavours to equal their virtues. He would be enriched in every thing by Chriſt, ſo as to become behind his brethren in no gift, which may conduce to his eminence and uſefulneſs in his chriſtian ſphere; and thus he waits for the coming of Jeſus Chriſt, who, he truſts, will confirm him to the end, that he may be blameleſs in the day of Chriſt Jeſus his Lord.

But I may no longer detain you on this branch of my ſubject. I proceed,

II. To ſhew the excellency and amiableneſs of this forwardneſs in religion.

Paul commends Epenetus and calls him his beloved, becauſe he was the firſt fruits of Achaia

to Chriſt. He boaſts to the Corinthians concerning the forwardneſs of them in Macedonia, and to the latter concerning the forwardneſs of the Corinthians, in the common cauſe of Chriſt.

1. This forwardneſs is commendable as an evidence of ſincerity. It ſhews the concurrence and engagedneſs of the heart. The hypocrite is ſlothful in buſineſs; or zealous only in ſome leſs important matters. One who is forward in the great concerns of religion, and maintains his fidelity to Chriſt, even when others deſpiſe or oppoſe his cauſe, gives ſubſtantial proof that his heart is right with God. He may find joy in the conſciouſneſs, that his converſation is in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity.

2. This forwardneſs in religion is commendable on account of its uſefulneſs.

The ſlothful, negligent chriſtian emboldens ſinners in their tranſgreſſions, and confirms them in their ſtupidity. If he ſleeps as do others, he will lull them into a profounder ſleep. But he who is forward in religion, not only reproves negligent chriſtians, but condemns ſecure and thoughtleſs ſinners. When Noah obeyed the divine warning, it is ſaid, he condemned the world. The zeal of ſome in Corinth provoked very many. When a ſinner awakes to repentance, and runs no longer with former companions to exceſs of riot, he warns them to repent and forſake the path of deſtruction. His engagedneſs in the work of ſalvation, admoniſhes them of its importance. When a youth yields himſelf

himself to Christ, professes his gospel, and walks agreeably to it, his example invites his fellows to forsake the foolish and live, and to go in the way of understanding. A rich harvest ensued, when Epenetus had offered the first fruits to Christ. Should some of you, my young hearers, discover a warm but modest zeal in the work of Christ; and an active, but steady concern for your own salvation, you know not how many might be won by your example. While you are saving your own souls, you know not how many more might be saved by your means. While you are doing good to yourselves, you know not how much good you might do to others. ¿ How delightful would be the reflection to your own minds, that you had been the first fruits to Christ, and that your offering had been followed with a plenteous harvest? ¿ How much would it sweeten life to think, you were following Christ to glory, and, by your example, drawing others along in the same joyful path? ¿ How much will it add to the delights of heaven, to find, that your first fruits have been the means and occasion of gathering a harvest of sheaves into Christ's garner? Animated by such thoughts and prospects, come, engage in the service of Christ, and shew such diligence and forwardness in it, that your zeal may provoke very many.

3. This forwardness in religion is commendable, as it is honorable to Christ. To him belong the first fruits of your lives. You are redeemed by his death; you are bought with the price of his

blood. Glorify him therefore in your body and ſpirit, which are his. Preſent yourſelves holy to him. This is your reaſonable ſervice. How can you honor him, but by the dedication of yourſelves to him? The more forward you are in his cauſe, the more honor you bring to his name. The earlier you begin to ſerve him, the greater ſervice will you do him. The more active and diligent you are, the more influence your example will have on others.

Chriſt is honoured by the increaſe of his ſubjects. By your forwardneſs, you will contribute to this increaſe.

4. Forwardneſs in religion is commendable as an imitation of Chriſt.

He was, in early life, about his Father's buſineſs. He ſaid, "I muſt work the works of him that ſent me." It was his meat and drink to do God's will. He was forward on all occaſions to promote the honor of God and the happineſs of men. Fervent was his love to men's ſouls, and ſtrong was his abhorrence of ſin. He went about doing good. No dangers, not even death in its moſt dreadful form, could damp the ardor of his reſolution, To him was applied the expreſſion of the Pſalmiſt. "The zeal of thine houſe hath conſumed me." We are to learn zeal, as well as humility, of Jeſus Chriſt. It is the Chriſtian's greateſt honor and happineſs to be like him.

5. This forwardneſs in religion is amiable and commendable, becauſe it is in the higheſt degree

rational.

rational. It is regarding things according to their nature and importance. It is directing our zeal to the right object; and employing our activity in a matter of the higheſt moment, and moſt laſting conſequence. ¿ How trifling are all the intereſts of this world, compared with the future? ¿ What is the body to the ſoul, and this momentary life to eternal duration? Religion is the means of our future and everlaſting happineſs. It is that on which our all depends. ¿ In what then ſhould we be forward and zealous, if not in this? ¿ What ſhall we be diligent about, if we may neglect our ſalvation?

Finally; We have no promiſe of ſucceſs on any other condition, but diligence in our work.

This is the command of Chriſt. Seek firſt the kingdom of God. Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate.

This is the direction of the Apoſtle. Work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you. Be not ſlothful in buſineſs, but fervent in ſpirit, ſerving the Lord. Flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope ſet before you. Such is the conſtant language of ſcripture. Think not then, that you are to be ſaved in a way of negligence. The promiſe is only to thoſe who give diligence to make their calling and election ſure.

It is by forwardneſs in religion, that you become entitled to the conſtant aids of God's grace. God gives his holy Spirit to them who aſk, and ſeek and knock. He works in thoſe

who work out their own ſalvation. He beſtows his bleſſing on thoſe who pray with all prayer, and watch thereunto with all perſeverance.

Let the united influence of theſe motives prompt us to zeal and activity in religion, excite the young to offer the firſt fruits, and all to offer the remaining fruits of their lives to God, that having our fruit unto holineſs, our end may be eternal life.

THE END OF THE THIRTYFOURTH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XXXV.

The Obscurity and Uncertainty of the way of the wicked.

PROVERBS, iv. 19.

The way of the wicked is as darkneſs: They know not at what they ſtumble.

THE way of the wicked is here contraſted to *the path of the juſt. This*, the wiſe man ſays, *is as the ſhining light, which ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

The virtuous and upright man walks in the light, and clearly diſcerns his way. He looks well to his goings, and ſhuns the evils which he foreſees. If he is in doubt, he makes enquiry, and attends to the anſwer. His path grows plainer, the farther he advances; and ſmoother, the more it is trodden. An increaſing pleaſure

invites him along, and a cheeerful hope quickens his ſteps.

The reverſe of this is the way of the ungodly. Their path is involved in darkneſs, and beſet with ſnares. They ſee not what dangers await them, nor into what miſchiefs the next ſtep may plunge them. They have no ſecurity where they are, and find none where they go. All around them is obſcurity, and all before them is uncertainty. Such is the way of the wicked; and in this reſpect, as well as many others, the way of tranſgreſſors is hard.

There can be no real ſelf enjoyment without inward peace and conſcious ſafety. A ſtate of doubtful apprehenſion, in caſes of importance, is a ſtate of diſquietude and uneaſineſs. To be ſuſpended between hope and fear, is to hang in torture. And there are caſes in which the anticipation of evil is as diſtreſſing as the evil itſelf, and ſuſpenſe is as painful as to realize the worſt.

We will conſider the unhappy ſtate of the wicked, in this reſpect, that it is a ſtate of *inſecurity* and *uncertainty*.

We will view the ſinner in ſeveral different lights—as believing the great principles of religion, but contradicting them in practice—as aſſuming an external form of religion without integrity of heart—as acknowledging the obligations of natural religion, but diſcarding revelation—and finally, as renouncing all religion, whether

whether natural or revealed, both in theory and in practice.

These several descriptions will comprehend all sorts of wicked men; and, in each of these views, we shall find them to be in a state of great uncertainty and insecurity; and therefore, in a state far remote from happiness.

1. We will consider the man, who admits the principles of religion in speculation, but contradicts them in practice. *His way is darkness.* Light, indeed, has come to him; but he loves darkness rather than light. He is not guided by the dictates of reason, or the precepts of revelation; but pursues a course in direct opposition to both. He professes to believe the divine authority of the gospel but will not be subject to it. He acknowledges an eternal state of retribution; but conducts as if there were none. He complains of the vanity of the world; but in the world he seeks his happiness. He allows the important difference between moral good and evil; but in practice confounds the distinction. He does not walk by any steady rule, or follow any certain line of conduct; but is driven in various directions by the impulse of lust, passion and interest. He never knows what course he shall next pursue; for he cannot tell what the next impulse will be; what gust of passion will take him, or what wind of temptation will drive him away.

While the love of the world reigns in him supreme, he is exposed to every vice. No iniquity

iquity will he decline, which promiſes him ſucceſs in his favorite purſuit. Determined on his object, he falls into temptation and a ſnare, and many fooliſh and hurtful luſts, which drown men in perdition.

He knows, indeed that his courſe is dangerous: He intends to ſtop in ſeaſon, and turn to the path of virtue. But vain is his purpoſe. The way before him is covered with darkneſs. He cannot ſee whither he is going, nor where he ſhall make a ſtand. He has wandered from the right way, and ſtill he will love to wander.

The path of vice is full of windings. One devious tract leads on to another. The farther one proceeds, the more he is bewildered, and the more difficult and doubtful will be his recovery. Like the traveller, who has loſt his way in the night, he is deceived by every diſtant light which appears, and miſled by every new path which opens: The deep and dangerous moraſs he miſtakes for a ſmooth and ſpacious plain: He deviates ſo far, and changes his courſe ſo often, that his head is turned, and ſcarcely will he believe the friend who points out his homeward way.

It is the hope of future repentance, which reconciles the ſinner at preſent, to his guilty courſe. But his hope is attended with great uncertainty. Every ſtep in his progreſs increaſes the difficulty, and leſſens the probability of his return. New temptations meet him to entice him along; and new embarraſſments are thrown behind to obſtruct his retreat. His way forward is down

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the hill; to return he muſt climb the precipiece. By habit his mind becomes more inclined to evil, his imagination more faſcinated to pleaſure, and his conſcience more callous to reproof. Long accuſtomed to procraſtinate, he can procraſtinate ſtill, and do it with greater facility, and with leſs regret, than at firſt. The proſpect of a future ſeaſon and a better opportunity ſtill flatters and beguiles him. That daily he is growing older, and death drawing nearer, he well knows; but never does he feel himſelf ſo old or infirm, but that he fancies he may hold out ſome time longer; and his intended repentance is limited within the time which he expects to live. Thus by repeated reſolutions, and continued delays, he deadens a ſenſe of religion, and becomes hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin. In the mean time, he cannot tell, but the grace of God may withdraw its kindly influences, and the providence of God withhold its wonted protection; unexpected death may break his penitential purpoſes, or ſtupidity of conſcience extinguiſh his ſerious ſentiments.

Thus his way is dark and doubtful. He enters upon it without light, and walks in it without a guide. He knows not whither he ſhall wander, nor to what lengths he ſhall proceed; what temptations will decoy him, nor what ſnares will intangle him. He has departed from the way of peace, nor can he be ſure that he ſhall find it again. "His own iniquities ſhall take the wicked himſelf, he ſhall be holden in the cords of his ſins; he ſhall die without inſtruction,

ſtruction, and in the greatneſs of his folly, he ſhall go aſtray."

2. Let us conſider the hypocrite, who, without integrity of heart, aſſumes the external form of religion. His way is *dark* and *ſlippery*.

He believes that there is ſuch a thing as religion, and that it is a matter, in which he is really concerned. He views a future ſtate as certain, and preparation for it as immediately important. He thinks of death as a change which is near, and which, whenever it comes, will place the ſons of men in a ſtate vaſtly different from this—in a ſtate of endleſs happineſs or woe. "His heart is, indeed, full of love to this world; but, ſince he muſt leave it, he wiſhes to have a good hope in the view of another. Death is a terror to him; but die he muſt; and he deſires to die the death of the righteous, and like him to finiſh his days in peace. He is ſure he ſhould enjoy himſelf, and his earthly treaſures much better, if he could only free his mind from this painful bondage to the fear of death—this troubleſome apprehenſion of the wrath to come. He applies himſelf to obtain that eaſy and tranquil ſtate, which ſeems ſo deſirable. He has no more love to religion, than he uſed to have. Terror only has awakened him from his guilty ſlumbers. It is not the temper of godlineſs; it is only the pleaſure of a good hope, which is the immediate object of his deſire. Under the influence of this deſire, he examines the nature of religion; but forms lax and partial notions

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of it: He attends, with diligence, to ſome religious duties; but choſes thoſe which coſt him little ſelfdenial: He avoids groſs immoralities; but is not ſo ſcrupulous in ſmaller matters: He makes a good profeſſion, and does as much as he thinks neceſſary to ſupport a fair character: Invited by ſome new appearance of zeal, and by a proſpect of having his converſion ſoon ſanctioned, he, perhaps, joins himſelf to a new ſect: He there hears things ſpoken which flatter his ſpiritual pride: He magnifies his good works, and ſhuts his eyes againſt his evil ones; eſpecially againſt the corruptions of his heart: He compares himſelf with ſome others, and fancies the compariſon turns much to his advantage. So the Phariſee truſted that he was righteous, becauſe he faſted often, abſtained from adultery and extortion, and was not ſo vile as he thought a certain publican to be; ſelecting, for the compariſon, a man whom he deſpiſed; though really a much better man than himſelf. Thus the hypocrite, partly by ſinking the chriſtian character below what it ought to be, and partly by exalting his own above what it really is, acquires a hope, that his future intereſt is ſecure.

But ſtill his ſtate is darkneſs. He gains his hope by ſelfdeception, and maintains it by ſelfflattery; not by an impartial examination of his heart and a diſtinct knowledge of his character. The hope which he obtains, is not the

precious

precious metal which brightens in the trial; it is a rotten ſubſtance, which ſhines only in the dark. Amidſt his preſumptuous confidence, there is uſually a ſecret ſuſpicion, that all within is not ſound. There is a jealouſy and diſtruſt of himſelf. There is a conſciouſneſs of ſome partiality, precipitancy and unfairneſs in the judgment which he has made. His heart does not feel right. There is not that deep, calm, ſenſible pleaſure, which accompanies godly ſincerity, and pure, unaffected religion. The hope, which ſprings ſpontaneouſly from an honeſt and good heart, is ſubſtantial and ſatisfying. The labored, artificial hope of the hypocrite, is hollow, empty and unſound. It will not bear the touch. Like the fruit of Sodom, it looks fair to the eye, but when it is handled, it turns to ſmoke and aſhes. The honeſt chriſtian examines and proves himſelf, whether he is in the faith. He adopts the humble prayer of the Pſalmiſt, "Search me, O God, and try my heart; ſee if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlaſting." The hypocrite diſtruſtful of his caſe, glides over it ſuperficially. Like a man of ſuſpicious worldly circumſtances, he is afraid to look into his affairs and adjuſt his accounts—to compare his debts and credits, his means and expenſes, leſt he ſhould find himſelf haſtening to bankruptcy. A painful ſuſpicion, now and then, intrudes itſelf and demands a reckoning; but he diſmiſſes the intruder with fair promiſes,

and

and conſoles himſelf with new flatteries. Thus he paſſes through life in darkneſs and uncertainty. His hope ſprings from ignorance of himſelf and religion; it is attended with diſtruſt and anxiety, and will iſſue in painful diſappointment.

We proceed,

3. To conſider the wicked man in another point of light; as believing the great truths of natural religion, but diſcarding revelation.

His way is covered with *darkneſs*. He has no light to direct his eye or guide his ſteps. With reſpect to the nature, condition and means of future happineſs, an awful uncertainty attends him. There is no ground on which his faith can ſtand; no ſupport on which his hope can lean.

He believes there is a God, a providence and a future life. He believes men are moral and accountable beings, who will hereafter be treated in ſome meaſure according to their characters. So much, he thinks, is taught by reaſon. But the goſpel, conſidered as a revelation from God, he rejects as uſeleſs, and incredible. Its moral precepts he acknowledges to be good; but the doctrines of ſalvation through a dying Saviour—of renovation by the influence of the Holy Spirit—of eternal life as a gift of ſovereign grace—and of everlaſting puniſhment as the wages of ſin, and the deſert of unbelief—theſe he will not receive, nor own the authority of the book which contains them. They are too oppoſite to his pride and ſelfconceit, to his worldly

worldly affections and fleshly lusts, to obtain a place in his creed.

¿ Now what does this man gain by rejecting the gospel ?——He only gives up the *hopes* of religion: He neither cancels its *obligations*, nor annihilates its *terrors*.

Every man, who has just sentiments of morality, must know, that he is under obligations to virtue; and every man who is acquainted with himself, must confess that he has, in many instances, violated these obligations, and therefore stands guilty before God; and every man, who has any rational apprehensions of the Deity, must acknowledge, that vice is contrary to his nature, and deserving of his wrath. If we set aside the gospel, yet it still remains a truth—a truth founded in the principles of reason and nature, that the sinner is exposed to punishment.

The gospel has not created any new danger, or contrived any new punishment, which without it would never have existed: But it has warned men of their real danger, and pointed out the way of deliverance. It teaches us, that God is rich in mercy to those who call upon him—that he will pardon and accept repenting sinners, how guilty soever they have been—that he will assist by his grace those who frame their ways to turn to him. Our hope in God's mercy it confirms by explicit promises, and especially by the discovery of a Saviour who died to take away the sin of the world.

If

¿ If we reject this Saviour, to whom ſhall we go?——¿ If we refuſe the corner ſtone which God has laid, on what foundation ſhall we build?——Reaſon teaches us our obligations, and conſcience owns that we have broken them. Our guilt and danger are undeniable. ¿ But where do we learn, that God will forgive—that he will accept of repentance—that on repentance he will pardon all ſin—that his grace will abound unto eternal life—that he will give his holy Spirit to them who aſk him?—Theſe conſoling truths, reaſon can never teach; we learn them only from the goſpel. The man, therefore, who rejects this, walks in darkneſs. He has no light to guide him in the way of peace. He knows not whither he goes.

4. There is another view, which we are to take of the wicked. We will conſider them as renouncing the great principles of natural religion, the exiſtence and government of God, moral obligation, and a future retribution. There are ſome ſuch infidels as theſe; but their way is covered with darkneſs, more gloomy and diſmal than that which involves the path of other tranſgreſſors.

A thinking man—and ſuch men pretend to think with ſuperior freedom—a thinking man can have no ſettled peace, on any principles but thoſe of religion; becauſe on no other can he poſſeſs any kind of ſecurity. If we ſet aſide the belief of a God, a providence, and a future

exiſtence, all before us is uncertainty and confuſion, darkneſs, and horror.

Take an Atheiſt, and examine what ſource of light and comfort he can find.

He believes that when he dies there is an end of him; that this ſpark of intellect is extinguiſhed, and will be kindled no more. On this belief, he purſues the pleaſures of the world, as the only object worthy of his attention. "Let us eat and drink," ſays he, "for tomorrow we die."

But will this ſentiment, even admitting it were true, cheer and brighten his paſſage through life? No; it will cover his path with darkneſs. How gloomy the thought, that this rational nature—this conſcious mind, muſt be blotted out of creation, and utterly extinguiſhed forever!

Annihilation, indeed, is not ſo horrible an event, as poſitive and perpetual miſery: But ſtill it is horrible; and no man will indulge the thought of it, unleſs it be, that he may thus relieve his mind from the fear of ſomething worſe.

Conſcious of guilt, the ſinner flies to this refuge for ſecurity: But perhaps his refuge will fail him.

Look around: Here is a mighty fabrick, a ſtupendous univerſe, which exhibits every mark of power, wiſdom and deſign. This in ſome way or other, has come into exiſtence. Certainly it does not look like the wanton ſport of chance; but like the regular operation of a

wiſe,

wiſe, benevolent, almighty Creator. If there is a God who made the world and placed men upon it, undoubtedly he obſerves and diſtinguiſhes their different actions; and it may juſtly be expected, that he will treat them accordingly.

The Athieſt then, after all he can ſay, muſt view himſelf as in a ſtate of danger—after all his ſelfflattery, he muſt fear, that there is a day of reckoning at hand.

But even though he could be ſure, that there is no God, or providence, and that the world, and all that belongs to it, are the effects of *chance* or *fate*, ſtill, ¿ What ſecurity has he, that he ſhall not be miſerable; yea, miſerable in the extreme, and forever? If accident, or neceſſity has thrown him into exiſtence here, it may as well throw him into exiſtence ſomewhere elſe; and in what condition he ſhall find himſelf at the next change, he cannot conjecture. It is at leaſt an equal chance that, when the body is diſſolved, he ſtill ſhall live a conſcious being: And, if he has an exiſtence, this may as well be miſerable as happy. If chance has ſubjected him to ſome miſery in this ſtate, perhaps it will handle him more rudely in the next. There is no knowing, what contingence or neceſſity may do; and no proviſion can be made againſt the caprice of the one, or the tyranny of the other.

The man, then, who diſbelieves the exiſtence and providence of a God, and the difference between moral good and evil, muſt be in a moſt

gloomy and dismal state. His way is darkness. He has no security in any line of conduct, and he cannot conjecture what is before him in the confusion of events. Every thing bodes danger and threatens misery. There is no being to whom he can repair for help—no sanctuary to which he can retreat for safety. Even virtue is confounded, and prudence is nonplussed. Do what he will, he lies at the mercy of wild and wanton chance, or of cruel and unexorable fate. His forethought is blind, caution is useless, and prayer is vain. There is no security of good, or remedy for evil. All around him is darkness, and all before him is horror.

Say now, ¿ Is this a desirable state ?—¿ A state for which a wise man would exchange the comforts of religion ?——

¿ What peace and satisfaction can a mortal feel without a persuasion, that there is a wise, just and good Being, who made and governs the world, and that this Being is his friend ?—¿ That there is a way to obtain the protection and secure the favour of this Being, and that he has found and chosen the way ?

With this persuasion he may possess a cheerful serenity amidst all the vicissitudes of life; for to the virtuous, God is a present help in trouble, and all things will he turn to their advantage. "God is our refuge and strength," says the Psalmist; "therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

though

though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the mountains ſhake with the ſwelling thereof."

A wiſe and thinking man, as he regards his own peace and happineſs, will endeavour fully to underſtand what religion is, and on what ground it ſtands; what it requires him to be, and forbids him to do; what hopes and what fears it propoſes, as motives to duty. When he has learnt what religion is, it will be his next concern to comply with its deſign and ſecure its bleſſings. And next to this, it will be his care to know his own character and condition, and to judge whether he may ſafely appropriate the promiſes of religion, or is ſtill expoſed to its threatenings.

Conſider then, what beings you are. You have a rank aſſigned you in the intelligent creation. Look around, and behold plain evidences of the exiſtence and government of a Deity. Realize your dependence on him and accountableneſs to him. Reflect on your important ſituation. You are on trial for eternal happineſs. How precious then is every hour! Think of your advantages. To you God has committed his ſacred oracles. Here, under a conſciouſneſs of your guilt, you may find hope and comfort. Here you may learn, that God is merciful to forgive the penitent, and to ſupport their virtuous reſolutions—that his ſalvation is diſpenſed to ſinners, through the righteouſneſs of his ſon, and that it is unto all, and upon all

them who believe in this Saviour, and there is no difference. Here alſo you learn, that if you ſin preſumptuouſly, after you have received the knowledge of the truth; if you do deſpite to the Spirit of grace, and trample on the blood of the Redeemer, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin.

Go now, fall down before God in the exerciſe of humble faith and deep repentance; renounce every ſin, and yield yourſelves to him, to ſerve him in newneſs of life. Cultivate in your hearts the temper which the goſpel requires. Repel with indignation every attack on your faith and virtue. Indulge no ſentiments which tend to corrupt the manners.—Make improvements in knowledge, and abound in every good work.

The zealous practice of religion, is the beſt guard againſt error in doctrine, and defection from the truth. Maintain a good conſcience, and you will not make ſhipwreck of the faith. Shun the way of the wicked; for this is as darkneſs; they know not at what they ſtumble. Walk in the path of the juſt; for this is as the ſhining light, which ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day.

END OF THE THIRTYFIFTH SERMON.

SERMON XXXVI.

A Paralytic healed on the Faith of Others.

MARK, ii. 5.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the Palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

BY the preaching and miracles of Jesus Christ in Capernaum, his fame was much celebrated in that city and in the country around; so that wherever he went, as soon as the people knew where he was, they crowded around him; some to hear his doctrines, and some to receive cures for themselves or their friends.

At the time of the transaction referred to in the text, he was in a private house in this city, whither, it seems, he had retired for refreshment and rest. The people, hearing that he was there, gathered together in such multitudes, that there

was no room to receive them, not even about the door. And while he was preaching the word to them, probably from an upper chamber in the houſe, there came four men, bringing on a bed, a poor helpleſs patient, with a deſign to lay him before Jeſus; hoping, that, moved at the ſight of ſuch a miſerable object, he would exert for his relief that healing power, with which he was endued. When they drew near the houſe, they found ſuch a throng within and around it, that they could not come to him through the door: They therefore aſcended to the roof of the houſe, (for the Jewiſh houſes, being flat roofed, had ſtairs without) and there opened a paſſage ſo wide, as to let down the paralytic, with his bed, into the chamber, where Jeſus was. "And he, ſeeing their faith, ſaid to the ſick of the palſy, Son, thy ſins be forgiven thee."

The great pains, which they took in this caſe, diſcovered their full belief of Chriſt's power and mercy to heal this unhappy man. Jeſus could as eaſily have healed him at a diſtance; but that the miracle might be as publick as poſſible, he ſuſpended the exerciſe of his healing power, till they had let the man down before him through the roof. For his miracles were deſigned, not merely for the benefit of the particular perſons, who were the immediate ſubjects of them; but rather for the general benefit of mankind in eſtabliſhing the truth of his goſpel.

The phraſe uſed to expreſs the ſick man's releaſe from his infirmity is, *Thy ſins be forgiven thee.*

thee. That it is not a remiſſion of the moral guilt of ſin, which is here intended, is evident, becauſe it was granted upon the faith of others. Whether the paralytic himſelf believed, or not, it is not ſaid—be this as it may; yet *his* faith was not the ſpecial reaſon of his being healed, but the faith of thoſe who brought him. As the deſign of the miracle was to make a publick diſplay of Chriſt's divine power, ſo *their* faith, and not the faith of the patient himſelf, gave occaſion for the exerciſe of this power in healing him; for it was *their* faith which brought the patient before him in this conſpicuous manner. The remiſſion of moral guilt is granted only on perſonal faith and penitence. In the following words our Saviour ſufficiently explains what he here intends by this phraſe. When ſome reaſoned within themſelves, "Why doth this man ſpeak blaſphemy? ¿Who can forgive ſin but God alone?" Jeſus ſaid, "¿Why reaſon ye theſe things in your hearts? Whether is eaſier to ſay, Thy ſins be forgiven thee; or to ſay, Ariſe, take up thy bed and walk? But that ye may know, that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive ſins, he ſaith to the ſick of the palſy, Ariſe, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine houſe. And immediately he aroſe, took up his bed, and went forth before them all. And they were all amazed, and glorified God."

The Jews conſidered temporal calamities, and eſpecially diſeaſes of body, as the puniſhment of ſome particular ſins, of which the ſufferers had been

been guilty. Hence this enquiry of the disciples concerning the man born blind; "¿ Who sinned, this man, or his parents?" For this reason, the removal of sickness was expressed by the forgiveness of sin; for it was considered as a release from the temporal punishment of it. This language is used in the Old Testament. The prophet says, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick, for the people shall be forgiven their iniquities." The Psalmist says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." This observation shews the perverseness of the Pharisees, in charging Christ with blasphemy, for saying, Thy sins are forgiven thee, when they knew it to be a common expression for release from bodily afflictions. They called that blasphemy in him, which in others would have passed as innocent.

What I would especially remark in these words, is the benefit, which this sick man received, from the faith of others. He was healed upon the faith of the men who brought him to Jesus. Several instances of the same kind occur in the history of Christ's miracles.

The faith of the centurion obtained a cure for his servant. The devil was cast out of a man deaf and dumb, through the faith of those who attended him, when he himself had no tongue to ask the favour. The daughter of one is raised from the dead, and the son of another is delivered from an unclean spirit by the faith of the father. The earnest prayer and strong faith of

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the woman of Canaan, obtained relief for her daughter, who was grievouſly vexed with a devil.

The conduct of the Saviour, in theſe inſtances, is agreeable to the general plan of God's moral government.

As he has placed mankind in a ſtate of mutual dependence, ſo it is an eſſential part of the conſtitution of his government, that ſome ſhall be benefited by the faith and piety, or ſhall be liable to ſuffer by the vice and wickedneſs of others.

The beſtowment indeed, of future and eternal bleſſings, muſt depend on perſonal qualifications. The happineſs of the heavenly world can be enjoyed only by thoſe, whoſe hearts are prepared for it, and whoſe tempers are aſſimilated to it. "Without holineſs no man can ſee the Lord."—"Except a man be born of the Spirit, and made partaker of a divine nature, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." But then God is often pleaſed to grant temporal bleſſings, and ſpiritual privileges and advantages to ſome, in conſequence of the faith, piety and prayers of others.

Obſervation ſhews us, that this is no uncommon caſe. The virtue and happineſs of communities greatly depend on the wiſdom and integrity of rulers. Publick manners are formed by the example of men in power and influence, and the national proſperity is connected with national virtue. So it is alſo in families. Not only the health and comfort, but the virtue and reputation of children, are owing in a great meaſ-

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ure to the wiſe care, good example, and faithful inſtructions of thoſe by whom they are educated. It is the parent who uſually gives the firſt virtuous or vicious turn to the manners of the young. And this early bias often determines the character for life. The child, trained up in the way in which he ſhould go, purſues it ſtill when he is old. The youth, neglected and left to his own perverſe inclinations, brings ſhame on his family, and ruin on himſelf.

The caſe is the ſame with neighbourhoods and chriſtian ſocieties. A few vicious perſons in a vicinity, will ſometimes corrupt a number more, and by degrees ſpread the infection of their baleful example far around. On the other hand, men of ſtrict virtue and exemplary piety, are, by their example and converſation, a great reſtraint on the wicked, and a mighty encouragement to thoſe who are virtuouſly diſpoſed.

The advantages which one enjoys by his connexion with the virtuous, and the dangers to which another is expoſed by his connexion with the vicious, are not always owing merely to himſelf, but often to the immediate providence of God, who allots to each one, ſuch trials, and ſuch aſſiſtances, as his wiſdom ſees fit. That one is born of virtuous parents, and receives the firſt rudiments of his education in a pious family—that another has his lot aſſigned him in an irreligious and prayerleſs houſe, is not the reſult of their own previous choice, but of the

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fovereign diſpoſal of providence. And every one, as ſoon as he arrives at the age of diſcretion and conſideration, is bound ſo to improve the advantages which he enjoys as to guard againſt the influence of the temptations which ſurround him.

From this part of the divine conſtitution, we may derive ſome uſeful inſtructions.

1. We ſee the reaſonableneſs of *interceſſion*.

If God is pleaſed to employ ſome men as *viſible* inſtruments of general good, we may rationally ſuppoſe, that he often, in a more *ſecret* and *inviſible* manner, connects the happineſs of many with the fervent prayers of a few, or even one godly ſoul. Of the Jews, in a corrupt period, the Apoſtle ſays, "They were beloved for their fathers' ſake: For the chriſtian churches which he had planted, he prays, that God would grant them his ſpirit and grace: And their prayers he ſolicits for himſelf, that God would aſſiſt and ſucceed him in his work, and ſupport and comfort him in his trials. And he profeſſes a full expectation of great and extenſive good, from the united efficacy of *his* and *their* ſupplications and interceſſions.

His prayers for them, and his requeſt of their prayers for him, and his advice to Chriſtians in general to pray for one another and for all men, are grounded on this principle, that God is pleaſed to grant favors to ſome, in conſideration of the faith, piety and interceſſion of others.

If

If this were not agreeable to the plan of God's government, there would be no foundation for interceſſion in any caſe whatever.

Though we are aſſured that God will never ſave an impenitent ſinner, on account of another's repentance or interceſſion, yet we may ſuppoſe, that, in anſwer to the prayers of godly friends, he often grants to ſinners the *means* of repentance, and his *bleſſing* to accompany theſe means, and to render them effectual.

God has ſeen fit to place men in a connexion with each other. He has put into them affections and feelings, which lead them to aſſociate together, and which intereſt them in each other's happineſs. He requires benevolence as a main principle of all virtue. For the encouragement of this benevolence, he is pleaſed to ſmile upon the regular operations of it, and to render them ſubſervient to our mutual happineſs. One exerciſe of benevolence is interceſſion; and it is as reaſonable to ſuppoſe that he ſhould make our mutual interceſſions beneficial to each other, as that he ſhould bleſs and ſucceed our inſtructions to children, our counſels to friends, our alms to the poor, or any other exerciſe of charity; for it is his influence that gives them efficacy.

Some will aſk perhaps, ¿ How is it reaſonable, that our future happineſs ſhould be made to depend on another's prayers? We have not the command of their hearts—we cannot oblige them to pray for us—¿ Why ſhould we be expoſed to ſuffer for their neglect?

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You will not suffer for their neglect; you will suffer only for your own. Ask humbly and you will receive; seek diligently and you will find. Comply with the terms of the gospel, and the blessings promised are yours. Do your own duty well and you are safe. God will not withhold from you any good thing, which you can claim on the foot of his justice, or his promise, whether others pray for you or not. But what if he vouchsafes to you some favours, which you have not asked, or which you have forfeited by neglect? ¿ What if, in his good providence, he brings you in the way of some useful warnings and instructions, and grants you some awakening and convincing influences of his kind spirit, when you have not sought them? ¿ And, what if he does this in answer to the fervent prayers of others? ¿ Will you say that all this is wrong? ¿Will you consider it as a matter of complaint? ¿ Will you think it unreasonable that christian friends should implore for you that mercy which you have despised, and that God should regard their prayers for you, when you make none for yourselves? —God will injure no man—he will break his promise with no man: But he often bestows undeserved and uncovenanted mercies—he often continues, or renews abused and forfeited favors. And these are not the less to be esteemed, because they are granted in consequence of the faith and prayers of others; but rather to be received with more admiring gratitude.

2. We

2. We ſee from this ſubject, that the doctrine of ſcripture concerning our being involved in the conſequences of the primitive apoſtaſy, is agreeable to the analogy of providence.

The ſcripture plainly teaches us, that the firſt man ſtood in a publick capacity, and acted for his poſterity; and that, in conſequence of his tranſgreſſion, they not only are expoſed to death, but inherit a diſordered conſtitution, a depraved nature, which, as ſoon as they begin their moral life, leads them aſtray. The Apoſtle ſays, "By one man ſin entered into the world, and death by ſin. By one man's offence death reigned. By one man's diſobedience many were made ſinners."

¿ Does this look hard and unjuſt ? It is nothing ſingular or uncommon.

If an offender againſt the ſtate is puniſhed with death or confiſcation, his children ſuffer loſs. The man who ſpends his ſubſtance in riot and debauchery, beggars his family as well as himſelf. The parent who, by intemperance, deſtroys his conſtitution, often tranſmits diſeaſes to his children, which renders their life unhappy, and iſſue in early death. Bodily diſorders diſtemper the mind, diſturb the paſſions, becloud the intellect, and introduce irregular inclinations. Not only bodily diſeaſes, but mental diſpoſitions, are often hereditary and tranſmitted from father to ſon. The vicious examples and corrupt principles of ſome parents, early deprave the minds and vitiate the manners of

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their children, and it is no easy matter to recover them to right sentiments and a virtuous life. ¿ And why is it thought unjust, that we should partake of some unhappy consequences from the first transgression, rather than that we should be liable to suffer for the misconduct of our immediate parents? The latter we see to be fact; and it were absurd to deny the former. But whether we believe the doctrine in question or not, still mankind are mortal in body, and depraved in mind. They are liable to death, and inclined to sin. Either they were made so in their original state, or by some subsequent means they are fallen into this state. ¿ And which appears most reasonable—That they should come out of the Creator's hands such as we now see them; or, that they should be suffered to fall into such a state in consequence of the perverseness and disobedience of their first progenitors?—¿ Should you see a nation in a state of distraction and riot, violence and confusion, Which would appear most credible—That this was the original constitution of their government; or, that it was an unhappy state, introduced by the folly and injustice of some, who, being appointed to act for them, had abused and perverted their constitution? If we deny the transmission of sin and death from the first offender, still we cannot thus get rid of sin nor of death. They are both in the world, and they both seem likely to continue: And our deliverance from them comes not by a denial of the cause which the scripture assigns,

but by an application of the remedy which God has provided.——This brings me to remark,

3. That our ſalvation through the atonement and righteouſneſs of a redeemer, appears to correſpond with the general conſtitution of God's moral government.

It is an eſſential part of the divine plan, that the virtue of ſome ſhould not only benefit themſelves, but extend its kind and ſalutary influence to others. We ſee this to be the caſe among men; and probably it is the caſe among all moral beings; except thoſe who are in a ſtate of puniſhment. The angels, we are told, are miniſtering ſpirits, ſent forth to miniſter to the heirs of ſalvation. On the other hand, the preaching of the goſpel, by the apoſtles, was intended, not only to make all men ſee what is the fellowſhip of the myſtery, which had been hidden from former ages, but alſo to diſplay unto principalities and powers, in heavenly places, the manifold wiſdom of God. And we are taught in the book of Daniel, that the angels ſtrengthen and help one another in the ſervices reſpectively aſſigned them. The glory of God's moral kingdom greatly conſiſts in the benevolence of his ſubjects toward one another, and in the diſpoſition of all to promote the general happineſs. Were it not agreeable to the divine conſtitution, that the virtuous actions of one ſhould, in ſome way or other, redound to the benefit of many, there would be no room for benevolence: It would ceaſe to be a virtue.

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It appears then to be a credible thing, that when the human race had fallen into guilt and ruin, a Saviour ſhould be ſent from heaven, to inſtruct them by his doctrines, to exemplify their duty in his life, and alſo to redeem them from puniſhment by his death; and that the benefits of his righteouſneſs and death ſhould be made over to them, on their humble faith and ſincere repentance. Though this diſpenſation of grace ſurpaſſes all human diſcovery, yet there is nothing in it contrary to reaſon, or to the analogy of providence; but, in many reſpects, it correſponds with both. The goſpel teaches us, that we are juſtified by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Chriſt; that we have redemption through his blood; that we are made the righteouſneſs of God in him; and that to as many as believe, God imputeth righteouſneſs without works. It is not the intention of Chriſt's death to ſave us from puniſhment in a way of ſin; but to procure for us pardon in the way of repentance. "He bore our ſins, that we, being dead to ſin, ſhould live to righteouſneſs." The mercy of God is inclined to pardon and ſave ſinners; but his wiſdom ſaw fit to diſpenſe pardon and ſalvation only through the blood of a Redeemer, that thus ſin might be condemned, God's juſtice diſplayed, and his law magnified. God ſent his ſon in the likeneſs of ſinful fleſh, that he, by a ſacrifice for ſin, might condemn ſin in the fleſh. He ſet him forth a propitiation, that he might be juſt and the juſtifier of them who believe. The

law therefore is not made void, but eſtabliſhed through faith. I would obſerve,

4. Our ſubject removes the principal objection urged againſt the dedication of infants to God in the ordinance of baptiſm. For it ſhews, that ſome may be benefited by the faith of others.

It is often aſked "¿ What advantage is baptiſm to infants? They have no knowledge of the uſe and deſign of it. They have not that faith, which is required to baptiſm. If they are baptiſed, it cannot be on their own faith; it muſt be on the faith of their parents: ¿ And what benefit can they derive from the faith of another?"

But this is no more an objection againſt the baptiſm of infants, than againſt interceſſion for infants. If your children are ſick, you pray for the preſervation of their lives. If they appear to be in danger of death, you pray for their reception into the world of glory. If when they come forward in life, you ſee them wickedly inclined, you pray for divine reſtraints. Yea, whatever be their caſe, you commend them to God's care and protection, and pray that he would impart to them his ſanctifying and ſaving grace. ¿ And do you not pray in faith; with a belief that God is merciful and gracious, and that your prayers may avail to obtain for them ſome real benefits? But if the faith of the parent can be no advantage to his children, ¿ Why ſhould you pray for them? ¿ If it can be an advantage, Why may you not dedicate them to God in baptiſm? The objection certainly is no ſtronger in the latter caſe,

caſe, than in the former. They are as ignorant of what you do in one caſe, as in the other. Chriſt often beſtowed healing mercy on children, when he was applied to in their behalf. And when ſome brought little children to him, that he ſhould pray for them, he complied with the requeſt. He took them into his arms, laid his hands on them, and bleſſed them, and ſaid, Suffer the little children to come to me, for of ſuch is the kingdom of heaven.

We ſee that the faith and prayers of parents may procure ſome advantages for children: ¿ Why ſhould the doubt ariſe in the caſe of baptiſm only? There ſeems to be no doubt in any other caſe.

It is not the faith of the parent, which ſaves his children. If they are ſaved, it is by the mercy of God through the redemption that is in Chriſt.

But then God has inſtituted a gracious covenant, in which he promiſes, that he will be a God to believers and to their children. In token of his faithfulneſs, he has appointed baptiſm as a ſeal of this covenant. The believing parent dedicates his children to God, truſting that he will be a God to them; that if they are removed in infancy, he will receive them to his kingdom; if they are continued in life, he will grant them the means of ſalvation, and will pour on them his ſpirit and bleſſing. At the ſame time, he reſolves, that he will bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. ¿ Now does it ſeem unreaſona-

ble that God ſhould exerciſe mercy towards children? That he ſhould expreſs his deſigns of mercy, by comprehending them within his covenant, and by making promiſes in their favour? That he ſhould require parents to give them up to him, and ſhould inſtitute a particular form and ceremony to be uſed on the occaſion? ¿ Is it no advantage to children to have the prayers of parents, and the prayers of the church of God in their behalf? ¿ Is it no advantage, that they ſhould be brought up under the care of thoſe, who have actually given them to God, and ſolemnly engaged to train them up for him? If there is any advantage in theſe things, then their baptiſm is a reaſonable ſervice.

¿ But ſhall we imagine, that no children are ſaved but the baptiſed offspring of chriſtians? I anſwer, God's tender mercies are over all his works; but the promiſes of the covenant are to believers and their children; not to unbelievers or heathens, as ſuch, and their children. Theſe we are to leave, where the ſcripture leaves them, in the hands of a righteous and merciful God. But, ¿ Is it no comfort to reflect, that there are given to us exceeding great and precious promiſes? Admitting that all who die in infancy will be ſaved, yet, ¿ Can it be thought unreaſonable, that the baptiſed offspring of pious Chriſtians ſhould have ſome advantages, in the kingdom of heaven, above thoſe who are not within the covenant of promiſe? The mercies of God are free, and he diſtributes them with a ſovereign hand, as

his

his wisdom directs. Our business is to attend to God's institutions and commands, and in the way of duty to trust his promises.

5. Our subject teaches us the importance of the station in which we are placed. We are acting not merely for ourselves, but for others—for many others—how many we cannot tell; for we know not how many are connected with us; nor how extensive may be the influence of our good or bad conduct.

A holy and religious life is certainly of vast importance to ourselves; for on this depends the happiness of our existence through all the succeeding ages of eternal duration. But when we consider ourselves as standing in a near connexion with our fellow probationers—when we realize, how much good a sinner may destroy, or a saint promote—how many souls may be corrupted by the example of the one, and how many may be converted by the influence of the other; the importance of our personal religion rises beyond all conception.

You view the minister, the ruler, and the parent, as having a station assigned them, in which others are deeply interested. You think, that they ought to act in their places with anxious fidelity, because on this may depend the happiness of multitudes. But remember, no man lives to himself alone. You are in a capacity to do much good; and your abuse of this capacity may, in its consequences, prove the ruin of thousands.

Viewing yourſelves in this light, you will, in regard to the happineſs of others, as well as your own, be careful what manner of perſons you are.

6. We ſee that benevolence muſt be an eſſential part of true religion.

If God has placed us in ſuch a connexion with thoſe around us, that their virtue and happineſs will be affected by our conduct, we are evidently bound to act with a regard to their intereſt.

We are, indeed, more capable of ſerving our own intereſt, than that of others; and the intereſt of our friends, than that of ſtrangers. We are, therefore, firſt charged with the care of ourſelves, and next with the care of our families and dependents. We know our own and their wants more perfectly, and feel them more ſenſibly, than we can the wants of thoſe at a diſtance. But we are to wiſh well to all; to do good, as we have opportunity; and to pray for thoſe, to whom our actual beneficence cannot extend.

Benevolence is a principle which ought uniformly to govern us, in the common duties of life and religion. We are to work with our hands the thing which is good, that we may not only ſupply our own wants, but give to them who need. And we are to maintain the practice of piety and virtue, that we may not only ſecure our own reward, but aſſiſt others in ſecuring theirs.

On this principle alſo, we are to exerciſe forbearance and condeſcenſion to one another, and to ſeek, not merely our own profit, but the profit

of

of many. The Chriſtian, who, under pretence of promoting piety in his own heart, acts, in doubtful matters, with a haughty indifference to the peace and edification of his brethren, plainly ſhows that he is void of that charity, which is the glory of religion, and without which all his zeal will profit him nothing.

Let us therefore, as becomes Chriſtians, exhort and comfort, ſtrengthen and encourage one another in every good work, and thus be fellow helpers to the kingdom of God.

THE END OF THE THIRTYSIXTH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XXXVII.

The Vial poured into the Sun; considered in accommodation to the present Times.

A FAST SERMON, *April*, 1794.

REVELATION xvi. 8, 9.

And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory.

WHATEVER may be the great events, or the precise period, primarily intended in this figurative description; it may justly be accommodated to any time, when the vials of God's anger are poured on a guilty world, and the effects produced by them, are increasing infidelity and impiety, instead of general repentance and amendment.

This

This book of the Revelation is a prophetick deſcription of the moſt intereſting occurrences, relating to the church, which were to take place in the world, from the time of ſaint John's viſion, down to the final judgment.

Whoever believes, that this book was written ſeventeen hundred years ago, as we have indubitable evidence that it was, muſt believe, that it was dictated by divine inſpiration; becauſe we ſee, in fact, that many of the events ſo long ſince foretold, have been exactly accompliſhed. To mention but one inſtance, and that a marvellous one; it foretels, That there would ariſe, in the Chriſtian church, an idolatrous power, which ſhould continue twelve hundred and ſixty years—that this power would gradually gain ſtrength, and widely extend its influence—that it would introduce and eſtabliſh the ſuperſtitions of paganiſm, and cruelly perſecute and deſtroy thoſe who adhered to the purity of the goſpel—that, in this long period, true religion would often be reduced to a low, and almoſt deſperate condition; but that, all along, there would be ſome to ſtand forth as witneſſes to its truth, and ſupporters of its intereſt, even at the peril of their lives—that toward the cloſe of this period, the idolatrous and perſecuting power would gradually decline, until it ſhould be utterly extinguiſhed, and the pure goſpel univerſally prevail.

And, ¿ Who does not know, that, within a few centuries after John's time, there actually aroſe ſuch a power, which has now continued in the

Chriſtian

Chriſtian world, for more than a thouſand years, exerciſing all that ſuperſtition, oppreſſion and tyranny, which are here deſcribed?—And, Who does not ſee, that this power has, for ſome years, been on the decline, and is now tending to its exit?

As it is difficult to aſcertain, with preciſion, the time when it aroſe; ſo it is difficult to determine, with exactneſs, the time when it will fall. But that it is now drawing toward its diſſolution, there can be no reaſonable doubt. All appearances juſtify this expectation.

Its deſtruction, however, will be attended with violent ſtruggles, and terrible convulſions, the effects of which will be extenſively felt. This we may juſtly apprehend from its national influence and connexions; and this ſeems agreeable to prophecy.

We are then to look for great events and important changes in the world, before the extinction of this oppreſſive power.

Some of the changes leading to its diſſolution are probably intended in our text. But whether they are already paſt, or ſtill future, or even now in operation, may perhaps be doubtful. Mr. Lowman thinks, that the words are a deſcription of the diviſions and convulſions, which rent the papal dominions in the fifteenth century, juſt before the reformation: And that the next vial, which was poured into the ſeat of the beaſt, is a prediction of the reformation itſelf. Biſhop Newton ſuppoſes, that none of the ſeven vials

have

have yet been poured out, but that they all reſpect times which are ſtill future.

Mr. Fleming, who publiſhed his ſentiments more than ninety years ago, has applied this prophecy, in part, to the time now preſent. And he has, with remarkable exactneſs of time and circumſtances, deſcribed ſome of the events of the day; ſuch as the violent conteſt between *France* and *Auſtria*, which are the principal parties in the preſent war; the depreſſed condition of France, and eſpecially of the royal family; and the ſuperiority, which France, in her turn, ſhould gain over her enemies.

Whether the principles, on which he grounds his calculations, are juſt, I ſhall not take upon me to determine. However this may be, there are ſeveral circumſtances in the preſent time, to which the prediction may be accommodated, and which point it out to us as a ſubject of our attention and improvement.

This correſpondence I ſhall firſt illuſtrate; and then ſhall lead your thoughts to a practical uſe of the paſſage.

The correſpondence of this prediction with the preſent time, I ſhall illuſtrate in ſeveral circumſtances.

The three preceding vials were poured out upon the earth, upon the ſea, and upon the rivers and fountains of water. This fourth is poured out upon the SUN. It muſt therefore portend ſome events more important and intereſting than the former.

The

The luminaries of heaven, in prophetick ſtile, denote kingdoms and empires. In the prophecy of Balaam, it is ſaid, "There ſhall come a *ſtar* out of Jacob, and a *ſceptre* ſhall riſe out of Iſrael." In Daniel's viſion of the he goat, it is ſaid, "His horn waxed great, even to the *hoſt of heaven*, and did caſt down ſome of the *ſtars* to the ground." The downfall of Babylon is expreſſed by "the falling of the *morning ſtar*." The *ſun* then, being the greateſt and moſt illuſtrious of the heavenly luminaries, muſt, in this prophecy, intend ſome of the *principal* kingdoms and powers of the world.

Farther: As the ſun is a body of the moſt extenſive influence in the ſyſtem, and that which gives light to other bodies, ſo the vial poured on the ſun naturally denotes a *general* war among the moſt reſpectable nations; a war ſo vehement and extenſive, that its malignant fury is felt in all the enlightened parts of the world.

It is ſaid, "Men were ſcorched with great heat." This probably intends ſome diſtinguiſhing circumſtances of cruelty and zeal in the manner of proſecuting the war.

The moral effect of it is a viſible increaſe of impiety and irreligion. "Men blaſphemed the name of God, who had power over theſe plagues, and repented not to give him glory."

Keeping theſe circumſtances of the prophecy in view, let us inquire, whether we cannot ſee them, at this period, remarkably verified.

The

The preſent *European* war is, with little intermiſſion, a continuation of the late *American* war. It evidently originated from our long and bloody conteſt with Britain for the rights of independence. The principles of republicaniſm, here aſſerted and defended both by the pen of the politician, and the ſword of the ſoldier, were, with a kind of electrical ſtroke, transfuſed through the army and navy of France, which had been ſent to our aſſiſtance. By them theſe principles were diſſeminated through that mighty kingdom. There they immediately began to operate with vigour, and ſoon they effected a complete revolution. Alarmed at this great event, the ruling powers of neighboring nations combined to reſtore and ſupport the exploded ſyſtem of monarchy. The houſe of Auſtria, from its near connexion with the royal family of France, took the lead, and other nations followed the example. The war is become general. The powers which remain neutral, may perhaps find themſelves under a neceſſity of taking part in the war, or of combining in force to preſerve their neutrality. If any particular nations are deſignated, in the prophecy, by the SUN, on account of their *power*, *influence*, or *enlightened* ſtate, theſe are certainly engaged in the controverſy.

And *they are ſcorched with great heat.* Never has a war been conducted with fiercer zeal and keener animoſity. In ordinary wars, the object is ſome point of honour, tract of territory, or privilege of trade. And after a few millions of

treaſure,

treaſure, and a few hundred thouſands of lives have been ſacrificed, the contending parties, wearied out and exhauſted, open a treaty of peace, make mutual conceſſions, and ſit down nearly in the ſame place, from whence they aroſe. But in this war the object is different. France is contending for her republican government: Kings are contending for their crowns. France expects, that, if ſhe is overpowered, ſhe muſt ſee her territory diſmembered, her exploded monarchy reſtored, her citizens enſlaved, and her liberties trampled in the dirt. The confederated kings expect, that if France ſupports her revolution, they ſhall feel convulſions in their own dominions, and ſee one revolution following another, till the crowns of monarchs are toſſed from their heads, and the ſceptres wreſted from their hands.

Theſe apprehenſions fire the zeal, and urge the exertions of the parties in ſupport of their reſpective objects. They view the controverſy, as embracing every thing great and important; and as not to end, like former wars, in mutual reſtitution, and a friendly accommodation; but either in the total ſubverſion, or in the general eſtabliſhment of abſolute monarchy.

The war is proſecuted with uncommon ſeverity.

For many years paſt the manners of mankind have, by the increaſe of knowledge, been gradually ſoftening. Even war had begun to diveſt itſelf of its horrors, and to aſſume a milder form.

But

But now we see the barbarity of uncivilized ages, which had been retiring, called back again on the stage.

But what most signally marks the coincidence of the prophecy with the aspects of the times, is the prevailing impiety.

Look through Europe;—¿ What symptoms of a reformation can you see ? ¿ Is there any increase of piety ?—¿ Any amendment of morals—any special attention to the interests of religion ? Even in France, which has experienced a variety of interesting events, ¿ Have there been any national acknowledgments of a governing Providence ? On the contrary, ¿ Are not the forms of religion derided, the principles of piety exploded, atheism avowed, and the entrance of their churchyards marked with this awful sentiment, that " Death is an eternal sleep ?"

It may be useful to inquire, ¿ What can be the cause of this *apparent* growth of irreligion among a people, who have long enjoyed the gospel, and are now under such severe calamities ?

This is, in some degree, the usual effect of war; especially of intestine and civil convulsions. These, when they rise high, and operate with violence, engross the thoughts and conversation, awaken malignant passions and bitter criminations, dissipate serious sentiments, and vitiate the manners.

In France, the established religion, for ages, has been popery, with its grossest absurdities. The revolution has suddenly torn off the mask

of ignorance, and broken the fetters of bigotry. People are now at liberty to ſee with their own eyes, to ſpeak what they think, and act what they pleaſe. In a zeal againſt the newly diſcovered abſurdities of ancient ſuperſtitions, many have ruſhed to the oppoſite extreme, and diſcarded even rational chriſtianity.

Infidels, of whom there have long been numbers among the men of learning and influence, taking advantage of the times, have induſtriouſly, and too ſucceſsfully, diſſemi[illegible]. their licentious opinions.

It may farther be obſerved, that the civil and eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhments were intimately incorporated; and the forms of religion made the tools of ſtate policy. The church and the nobility poſſeſſed a great part of the moſt valuable lands, and engroſſed a large ſhare of the publick revenues. As religion, in the hands of tyrants, has been made an inſtrument of oppreſſion, the people, on a ſudden diſcovery of the ſacrilegious fraud, have, in their ſurpriſe, conceived an indiſcriminate prejudice againſt the very name of religion; and, without waiting to diſtinguiſh the precious from the vile, and to ſeparate the rational from the abſurd, they have almoſt exploded the ſubſtance of chriſtianity. We muſt believe, however, that the ſeeds of truth are latent in the ſoil, and when this inclement ſeaſon is paſt, they will be cultivated with wiſer attention, and ſpring up under a more ſmiling ſky.

From

From what has taken place in France, we have cauſe to fear, what may be the general ſtate of religion, for a time, before the introduction of the happy period which the ſcriptures foretel.

In moſt of the nations of Europe the government is ſimilar to the late government of France; eſpecially in reſpect of the union of the civil and religious eſtabliſhments; and in reſpect of the deſpotiſm exerciſed over the body of the people. Before that happy period commences, there will be revolutions in favour of liberty. For civil liberty is a neceſſary preparative to the progreſs of truth, and a diſcriminating circumſtance of that time. Human nature is the ſame in other nations, as in France; and we may expect, that political revolutions will have the ſame effect on the ſtate of religion elſewhere, as they have had there.

The reaſons why the American revolution did not, with the ancient forms of government, ſubvert the forms of religion, were, becauſe religion and police were not in the ſame manner blended, and the people were more enlightened, and leſs oppreſſed.

Religion, in its natural tendency, is ſubſervient to the peace and happineſs of ſociety, and therefore ought to be protected and ſupported by the civil government; but it ought never to be ſo incorporated with it, as to become a tool of temporal domination.

From a view of the ſtate of Europe, from a recollection of what has taken place in France, and

from the prophetic intimations of ſcripture, there is much cauſe to fear, that deiſm and atheiſm, and, with them, every ſpecies of immorality, will, for a time, increaſe in the world, and religion ſink into obſcurity, or be confined to a narrow circle.

Perſecution probably will no more kindle her faggots, or draw her ſword. But a general indifference to, and contempt of the goſpel, may as ſadly depreſs the intereſt and glory of the church, as ever perſecution has done.

Infidelity is the laſt expedient, which the grand adverſary will employ, to baniſh truth from the earth. In this he may probably ſucceed for a while; but he will finally be defeated. When the rage of contention ſhall ſubſide, and Liberty ſhall extend her benign influence among the nations, their paſſions will ſettle into a calm; free enquiry will take place; the evidences of truth will riſe to view, and come home, with force, to the mind; a more plentiful effuſion of the divine ſpirit will be granted, than men's minds, amidſt the rage of war, and the tumult of revolutions, are capable of receiving; the goſpel will be preached with purity and zeal, and heard with candour and attention; its happy influence will be felt in ſociety and its divine power experienced in the heart; and the church will grow under the patronage of government, when pious rulers ſhall be its nurſing fathers.

While

While we lament the declining ſtate of religion in Europe, we may, with juſt concern, bring our reflections nearer home.

Since our late war with Britain, literature and arts have been improving in the country; but our moral ſtate appears not to be mended. To ourſelves we may apply God's reproof of Iſrael, "As they increaſed, ſo they ſinned." And we may fear the threatening which follows—"Therefore will I turn their glory into ſhame."

We have, too fondly for an infant people, imitated the luxuries of European nations. The pomp and ſhow of foreign courts ſeem to have charms too captivating to be reſiſted. Many of our private citizens affect a ſtile of living, which their means will not fully juſtify. Infidelity, in the ſeveral forms of deiſm, univerſaliſm, and fataliſm, has made threatening progreſs. Many are induſtriouſly labouring to throw off the ſalutary reſtraints, which the goſpel lays on men's paſſions and luſts. The publick worſhip of God, that kind and friendly inſtitution, is growing into awful neglect, not merely among the higher ranks, but among people of every claſs. The Sabbath, which was revered by our fathers, and obſerved with a conſcientious exactneſs, is treated with indifference. A religious profeſſion, and an attendance on the ſpecial ordinances of Chriſt, are, by many, utterly diſregarded. Family devotion ſeems to be growing into diſuſe, and family government is declining with it.

Though

Though we have lately experienced an important revolution, yet the day of danger may not be paſt: Before our moral ſtate does not promiſe us ſecurity. Our connexions with the nations of Europe are ſo ſtrong, and our reſemblance of them in impiety and wickedneſs is ſo great, that we may juſtly apprehend a ſhare in their calamities. When the vial is poured out upon the ſun, the burning beams will be darted far around, and the remote inhabitants of the earth, will be ſcorched with the malignant heat. Revolutions in Europe will probably ſhake our ground, and perhaps produce ſome new and unexpected changes. Let us not, in our proſperity, imagine that our mountain ſtands ſtrong, nor flatter ourſelves, that its foundation can never be moved.

Is it not apparent, that the words of our text, whatever period they primarily intend, may juſtly be accommodated to our own times?—Let us then ſeriouſly regard the practical inſtructions which they afford us.

1. We are here taught, that it deeply concerns us to give glory to God by repentance of ſin, and amendment of life.

It is the complaint in the text, that, under God's judgments, men repented not to give him glory. Let us beware, leſt this complaint be verified in us.

The eternal, independent God, manifeſts himſelf before our eyes in the grandeur and variety of the works which he has made, in the regular courſe

courſe of his providence, and in the judgments which he executes on the earth.

When we contemplate events in the natural, or political world, we are fully convinced, that there ſits, at the head of the univerſe, a Being of infinite power, unſearchable wiſdom, unwearied goodneſs, and perfect righteouſneſs. The Lord reigns; let the ſaints rejoice; but let the guilty tremble. Injuſtice and oppreſſion are often ſeen in the governments adminiſtered by men. "But marvel not at the matter. ¿ Doth not he who is higher than the higheſt regard it? And there be higher than they."

If we believe there is ſuch a Being, we muſt feel our obligation to glorify him. The man, who acknowledging the exiſtence and government of this all perfect Being, can baniſh him from his thoughts, live without a ſenſe of his goodneſs, or a fear of his diſpleaſure—without prayer in the day of diſtreſs, or praiſe in the time of proſperity—can confine his cares to the preſent ſhort term of exiſtence, and neglect all preparation for futurity—this man diſcovers a ſtupidity no leſs criminal than atheiſm itſelf.

By breaking the commandment, we diſhonour God: By returning to our duty, we give him glory.

Repentance is an acknowledgment of God, as a Being glorious in holineſs—a Being who cannot look on iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. It is a reliance on his great name, "The Lord God merciful and gracious,

forgiving iniquities, tranſgreſſions and ſins." It is a ſubmiſſion to his ſupreme authority, who has commanded all men, every where, to repent. It is a compliance with the benevolent purpoſe of his moral government toward our apoſtate race, which is to recover them from guilt and ruin, and bring them to glory and virtue. It is obeying the Son of God, who came to redeem us from iniquity, and to purify unto himſelf a peculiar people zealous of good works. It is embracing the kind motions of the divine ſpirit, who ſtrives with perverſe tranſgreſſors, to turn them from ſin to righteouſneſs, and from diſobedience to the wiſdom of the juſt.

2. The complaint in the text, "that under God's judgments, men repented not to give him glory," ſuppoſes and implies, that judgments are deſigned and adapted to awaken ſinners and bring them to repentance.

They diſplay the majeſty and ſupremacy of God, who has power over all plagues.

They ſhew us human weakneſs and dependence, and the precarious continuance of all earthly riches and glories.

They make it manifeſt to every eye, that he who rules in the heavens, can bring princes to nothing, and make the judges of the earth as vanity.

They demonſtrate the awful juſtice of God, who comes forth out of his place to puniſh the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity; and they ſolemnly warn us of that dreadful day,

when

when he will descend with fire, and ride forth in his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebukes with flames of fire.

They teach us the horrible nature and fatal tendency of vice; for from hence come wars and fightings. It is ambition, avarice and revenge, which have so often thrown the nations into confusion, and poured destruction over half the globe.

Wasting calamities are suited to make men thoughtful and serious, to remind them of a future world, and to impress on their hearts a sense of the vanity of this.

Wars, the most common scourges of guilty nations, multiply deaths, especially among the youthful and active part of our species; increase the number of distressed widows, helpless orphans, and mourning parents; render life and its enjoyments precarious; change the course of business; transfer property from man to man; dissipate wealth in the hands of one, and accumulate it in the hands of another, to be again scattered and driven away by the next rude blast, or the next sweeping surge.

In such an uncertain and gloomy state of things, when death, captivity and sorrow, stalk around—when worldly interests are all afloat, and the very ground on which we stand, is convulsed, one would think, mankind must become more serious and prayerful, more indifferent to this world, and more attentive to the vast concerns of futurity.

These

Theſe happy effects divine judgments doubtleſs produce on many; but the effects are far more partial than we ſhould have imagined.

Yea; Our text teaches us,

3. That men, under judgments ſent for their reformation, ſometimes grow more impious and incorrigible.

When the vial was poured out upon the ſun, and men were ſcorched with fire, "they repented not, but blaſphemed the name of God." The ſame was the effect of the next vial. When this was poured on the ſeat of the beaſt, "his kingdom was full of darkneſs, and men gnawed their tongues for pain, and blaſphemed the God of heaven becauſe of their pains, and repented not of their deeds." So, when the ſeventh angel poured out his vial into the air, there fell upon men a great hail, and they blaſphemed the name of God, becauſe of the plague."

Theſe expreſſions, doubtleſs, denote a great prevalence of impiety, profaneneſs and infidelity.

The wickedneſs which abounds under theſe vials, is of a very different kind from that which appeared under the former judgments, deſignated by the trumpets.

When the ſixth angel ſounded his trumpet, as related in the ninth chapter, the four angels bound at the river Euphrates, were let looſe to ſlay the third part of men.

This is, by Mr. Lowman, referred to the conqueſts of the Saracens in Spain and other parts of

of Europe, in the eighth century. But Dr. Newton and others apply it to the deſtructive wars of the Turks, or Othmans, in the eaſtern part of the Roman empire, which began in the thirteenth century, and continued, with ſome intermiſſions, until all the eaſtern empire was reduced under the Othman dominion.

Now it is remarked, that, "The reſt of the men, who were not killed by theſe plagues, yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they ſhould not worſhip devils, and idols of gold, ſilver, braſs, wood and ſtone; neither repented they of their murders, ſorceries, fornications and thefts."

It is obſervable, that, under the plagues of the vials, nothing is ſaid about the worſhip of idols and demons, and the practice of ſorcery and divination, and pretenſions to miracles and revelations. But it is ſaid, once and again, "Men *blaſphemed* the name of God." They diſcarded all revelation, and threw off all regard to God and his providence.

The difference is, in my mind, remarkable. Have not facts verified the predictions?

In preceding ages, whenever any great calamities fell on the papal dominions, every ſpecies of ſuperſtition was increaſed; ſuch as the worſhip of images, prayers for the dead, the adoration of ſaints, donations to the church, mortifications of the body, and the obſervance of feſtivals and holidays; for theſe were conſidered

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as the only means of removing divine judgment, and propitiating an angry Deity.

Theſe forms of ſuperſtition have, for ſome time, been ſinking into diſcredit. ¿ But do we find, that, as they have declined, rational religion has increaſed? ¿ Has not infidelity rather come forward to take their place?

Superſtition is not the prevailing characteriſtic of the day. But if impiety, infidelity and irreligion abound in the chriſtian world, and increaſe among *us;* we may conclude, that we have fallen into the times deſcribed in our text, or into times which much reſemble them.

4. There is one obſervation more, which naturally ariſes from our text; namely, that the vials of God's wrath will continue to be poured on the chriſtian world, 'till it is reformed.

Under the fourth vial, men repented not of their deeds; and therefore another immediately follows. Under *this* the ſame ſpirit of impiety remains; and a ſixth vial ſucceeds. Still men blaſpheme God's name, becauſe of their plagues; and plagues more dreadful, and more extenſive ſoon enſue.

If men's wickedneſs is a cauſe of divine judgments, incorrigibleneſs is a reaſon of their continuance. If by preceding plagues they will not be reformed, God threatens, that he will puniſh them ſeven times more—and ſtill ſeven times more—for their ſins. Such was the rule of God's government over the Jews: And ſuch is the method of his proceeding toward the chriſtian world.

Trumpet

Trumpet ſounds after trumpet, to alarm the ſlumbering church: Vial after vial, is poured forth to awaken and reclaim the guilty nations.

It is evidently God's deſign to purge out of his kingdom all things that offend, and to eſtabliſh in the earth a kingdom of truth and righteouſneſs; and until this glorious change ſhall be effected, his judgments will be continued. He has taken in hand the ſolemn work of reforming a guilty world; and he will ſee it accompliſhed.

We flatter ourſelves perhaps, that the awful judgments foretold, are to fall only on the papal nations; and that proteſtants will be employed as agents to puniſh the more guilty and corrupt. But we may apply to ourſelves the words of the prophet to the people of Iſrael, when they cruelly made war on their brethren of Judah: "¿ Are there not with *you*, even with *you*, ſins againſt the Lord your God?"

There are ſins among the proteſtant, as well as papal nations—in America as well as Europe. Wherever the plagues may firſt fall, the effects of them will be extenſively felt. The vials will be poured out, not only into the ſeat of the beaſt, but upon the earth, the rivers, the ſeas, the air, and even the ſun itſelf.

From the preſent aſpect of the times, the common analogy of providence, and the predictions and threatenings of ſcripture, we have reaſon to expect, that there will be great calamities among the nations of the earth; and that in theſe calamities we ourſelves ſhall have a ſhare. Our

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connexion and intercourſe with Europe render this probable: And there are alſo with us, even with us, ſins againſt the Lord.

God is undoubtedly working, in his providence, to bring forward a more happy ſtate of the church and of the world. But there is ſtill much to be done; and great calamities are yet to be expected.

This is the warning of ſcripture and providence; *Prepare to meet your God.*

Let us be well eſtabliſhed in the great principles of religion; and take heed leſt we be drawn away with the error of the wicked. When we ſee, or hear that licentious opinions abound, let us remember, that this is an event which the goſpel has foretold, and by this circumſtance let us be confirmed in our faith.

Perhaps the greateſt danger will not be in our day, but in ſucceeding times. Let us therefore train up our children in the knowledge and belief of the goſpel, and form their manners according to its doctrines and precepts.

They who poiſon the tender minds of the youth with licentious and deiſtical notions, or throw in their way books written with a deſign to ridicule and diſcredit the goſpel, are acting a part moſt unfriendly to the intereſts of ſociety, the church of God, and the ſouls of men.

Liberality of ſentiment, in oppoſition to blind bigotry, is much to be commended. But let no man, under pretence of liberality in religion, proſtrate religion itſelf. Openneſs of

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mind and candour of enquiry are amiable in chriſtian profeſſors; and amiable in the young. But to give their minds a bias in favour of infidelity, and in oppoſition to the goſpel, before they have capacity and opportunity for extenſive reading and critical reſearches, is not to promote, but prevent openneſs and candour. The goſpel is certainly harmleſs. It has no tendency to make men worſe. It will not debaſe their minds, corrupt their virtue, or render them unfriendly to one another. Its tendency is the reverſe. If a man does not believe it to be divine, yet he muſt believe it to be good. It is impoſſible therefore that any man, in labouring to obſtruct it, ſhould be influenced by laudable motives. They who, by writing or converſation, by publiſhing or circulating licentious books, ſpread the principles of infidelity, muſt have ſome unworthy deſign.

It is pretended by ſome, that if we educate youth in the belief of the goſpel, we prejudice their minds, prevent their freedom in enquiry, and make them only chriſtians by tradition.—But if the goſpel may be true, and is certainly good, a bias in its favour is, at leaſt, ſafe; a bias againſt it may be fatal. It is unjuſt, however, to call a religious education by the name of prejudice. As well may you give this name to a ſecular, or civil education. As well may you ſay, that youthful idleneſs and ignorance are fine preparations for future eminence in a ſecular calling, or a civil profeſſion.

If there is no danger in teaching our children the arts of life, there can be none in teaching them the exiſtence and providence of God, the immortality of the ſoul, the obligations of virtue, and the doctrine of ſalvation through a dying Saviour.

Theſe ſentiments are ſo agreeable to the dictates of reaſon, ſo adapted to the wants of nature, and ſo conducive to the peace of the mind, that the benevolent heart will wiſh their univerſal influence.

It becomes us alſo, to honour the inſtitutions of God, to ſanctify his day, attend on his worſhip and obſerve his ordinances; for theſe are the means of promoting knowledge, piety and virtue.

Let every one review his life, repent of his ſins, and work out his ſalvation. Our preſent term of exiſtence is ſhort; there is a world before us; death is our paſſage to that world. Prepared for death, we are prepared for every change which precedes it: Secure of heaven we have nothing to fear from this changing world.

Let us by our example recommend religion, ſupport its credit, and aid its influence; and to all our labours add our fervent prayers, that, in the midſt of the years, God would revive his work, and in wrath remember mercy.

THE END OF THE THIRTYSEVENTH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XXXVIII.

Religion eſſentially included in the Love of our Country.

LUKE vii. 4, 5.

And when they came to Jeſus, they beſought him inſtantly, ſaying, That he was worthy for whom he ſhould do this, for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a Synagogue.

THE perſon of whom this high character is given, was a Roman Centurion, who commanded a company of ſoldiers ſtationed in Capernaum. By reſiding in Judea, he had acquired a knowledge of, and was become a proſelyte to the Jewiſh religion; and by his juſtice and benevolence, he had greatly endeared himſelf to the people among whom he was converſant.

This officer had a ſervant, who was taken dangerouſly ſick. Having heard the fame of Jeſus,

he desired some of the elders of the Jews, to go and entreat his compassion for this unhappy young man. The elders went; and when they were come to Jesus, they besought him, with great importunity, to grant to the centurion the favour which he asked; alleging this argument, "He is worthy for whom thou shouldst do this, for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue."

As he had, for some time, dwelt in Judea, had embraced the religion of the country, and probably intended here to spend the rest of his days, he might now consider this as *his own* country. His love to the nation, with which he was connected, the elders urge as an evidence of his personal worth, and as a reason why they hoped Jesus would grant the favour requested. Jesus accordingly went and healed the servant. And, not only on account of the centurion's love to the nation, but also in regard to that benevolence which he expressed for a servant, the humility with which he made his application, the strength of his faith, and the just reasoning by which he supported it, Jesus, in the presence of the people, gave him this high commendation; "I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel."

The encomiums bestowed on this centurion, may lead us to consider the nature, and fruits of love to our country.

This is the same thing as love to our neighbour, with only such circumstantial differences, as arise from the different relations of the object.

Love

Love to our neighbour the apoſtle has explained, "Owe no man any thing," ſays he, "but to love one another; for he who loveth another, hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou ſhalt not commit adultery; thou ſhalt not kill; thou ſhalt not ſteal; thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs; thou ſhalt not covet: And, if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this ſaying, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour, as thyſelf. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Love to our country is this love to our neighbour, extended on the national ſcale, and applied to the national intereſt. It is a deſire of the general happineſs, and a diſpoſition to promote it, according to our rank and ſtation in ſociety.

This love, however, will not ſtop at the bounds of our country; it will paſs over, and extend its good wiſhes to the whole human race. It would rejoice to ſee, not one country only, but the world of mankind, in a ſtate of proſperity and happineſs.

As every man is charged with the immediate care of himſelf, and his family, ſo he naturally feels more ſenſibly for himſelf and them, than for mankind at large. But while ſelflove prompts him to ſeek his own intereſt, and natural affection excites him to conſult the intereſt of his particular friends, benevolence operating in a juſt degree, will reſtrain him from purſuing his

own intereſt, or that of his friends, in ways injurious to the rights of others.

A regard to our country is ſtrengthened by our connexion with it.—"For our brethren and companions' ſake, we ſay, Peace be within her." Selflove and benevolence are here combined. They cooperate and aſſiſt each other. But if we regard our country *only* for our own ſake, this is mere *ſelfiſhneſs*, a principle which will excite us to ſeek our country's good, or hurt, according as we imagine, the one, or the other will beſt promote our own ſeparate and perſonal intereſt.

Though we are not required to love another more than ourſelves; yet we are required ſo to love all men, as to *injure* none for the ſake of ourſelves; but even to ſacrifice our particular intereſt for the greater good of a number; not ſeeking our own profit, but the profit of *many* that they may be *ſaved*.

He who loves another with a pure heart, wiſhes all men happy. As he will not ſeek his own intereſt at the expenſe of his neighbours; or the intereſt of his friends at the expenſe of his country; ſo neither will he attempt or deſire to raiſe the glory, or extend the bounds of his country by oppreſſing or exterminating other nations, who have the ſame right, with himſelf, to exiſtence, liberty and happineſs.

War is always unlawful except in caſes of neceſſary ſelfdefence. Whenever its object is merely wealth, or glory, or the extenſion of territory, it

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is the moſt horrid of all crimes; for every crime is involved in it, and every calamity produced by it.

If a nation, already poſſeſſed of more territory than they can occupy, ſhould wantonly attempt to diſpoſſeſs other nations, by ſpreading among them promiſcuous deſtruction, whatever pretenſions they may make of love to their own country, they are but the robbers and murderers of their fellow creatures; and humanity will weep at their ſucceſs. The boaſted patriotiſm of the ancient Romans was only pride, ambition and avarice; and their love to their country, was cruelty to the human race.

Theſe remarks may be ſufficient to illuſtrate the general principle. We will now attend to its operations.

1. If we love our country, we ſhall be affected with her dangers and calamities.

"If I forget thee, O Jeruſalem," ſays the Pſalmiſt; "let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee; if I prefer not Jeruſalem above my chief joy, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." As all publick calamities are the conſequences of prevailing wickedneſs, love to our country will lament, not only the calamities themſelves, but eſpecially the vices, which operate to the introduction of them. "If ye will not hear," ſays the prophet to the impenitent Jews, "my ſoul ſhall weep in ſecret places for your pride, and mine eyes ſhall run down with tears."

2. This principle will reſtrain us from injuring, and prompt us to ſerve our country. "Love works no ill." "By love we ſerve one another."

All vice and immorality tend to the common miſery. In proportion as iniquity abounds, the publick proſperity is endangered. Conſequently every vicious man is bringing evil on his country. If his vices do not affect the general happineſs immediately, yet they may do it remotely, by corrupting the manners of others. No man is ſo inconſiderable, but that, by an evil example, he may deſtroy much good. The friend of his country will, on a principle of love, abſtain from every ſpecies of vice and impiety.

And on the other hand, he will practiſe every ſocial virtue.

If he is called to a publick ſtation, he will be faithful there, remembering, that he is exalted, not for himſelf, but for others; that his country has a demand upon him, which he is bound to pay; that ſhe is not a ſervant to him, but he is a ſervant to her; that he is veſted with authority, not to be miniſtered unto, but to miniſter.

If he acts in a private ſtation, he will be careful to fill his humble ſphere. He will live in all godlineſs and honeſty; cheerfully bear his part of publick burdens; contribute to the ſupport of reaſonable government; yield obedience to juſt and good laws; give his voice for the promotion of ſuch men as he believes are qualified, by their virtues and abilities, to lead

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in ſociety; and will uſe his influence for the general encouragement of religion.

As piety is the foundation of ſocial virtue, he will pay due reverence to thoſe ſacred inſtitutions, which are the means of bringing men to the knowledge of God and preſerving a ſenſe of his ſupreme government. In this view, he will honor the ſabbath, and the ordinances of divine worſhip, knowing them to be the inſtituted means of piety toward God, and of righteouſneſs and benevolence to men. This leads me to obſerve,

3. A lover of his country has an affection for the church of God, and a concern to promote its credit and intereſt.

The centurion ſhewed his love to the nation by building a ſynagogue. It cannot be doubted, that he attended at the ſynagogue too. He was a friend to religion; thus he ſhewed himſelf a friend to the nation. David ſays, "Becauſe of the houſe of the Lord, I will ſeek thy good." He regarded his own country above all others, becauſe the church of God was there. In this appeared Moſes's patriotiſm. "He choſe rather to ſuffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin for a ſeaſon." He eſteemed the reproach of Chriſt, greater riches than the treaſures in Egypt."

Chriſt is head over all things for the church. He has promiſed to preſerve her againſt all the aſſaults of her enemies. He orders the diſpenſations of his providence in reference to her good;

for her reformation, when she is corrupt; for her security, when she reforms. "As many as I love," says he, "I rebuke and chasten: Be zealous therefore and repent." A people so far degenerated, as to despise the means of reformation, soon lose their spiritual privileges, and, with them, their national security.

The church of God among a people, as long as she maintains her purity, is their strongest bulwark. "Beautiful for situation is mount Zion, the joy of the whole earth. God is known in her palaces for a refuge." But when she so far conforms to the manners of the world, as to cease to be a church of God, she falls under that awful threatening, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Since religion is so necessary to the happiness of civil society, an enemy to the former cannot be a friend to the latter. He who treats revelation with contempt; he who tramples on divine institutions; he who encourages vice and impiety by his example and conversation, does more to undermine the national security, than, by any other means, he can do to establish it.

4. Love to our country will express itself in prayers for her prosperity. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," says the Psalmist, "they prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces." The apostle directs, that "prayers be made for all men," and particularly "for them who are in authority,

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that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life.—This is acceptable in the ſight of God." Prayer is a proper expreſſion of our benevolence to men, as well as of our piety to God. If we believe that there is an allwiſe, and almighty Governor, who ſuperintends the affairs of nations, we muſt believe it to be his will, that we ſhould apply to him for national bleſſings and protections, as well as for perſonal ſupports and mercies.

I have illuſtrated the nature and operations of love to our country. I now aſk your attention to ſome reflections which reſult from the ſubject.

1. True patriotiſm is a nobler attainment than ſome ſeem to imagine.

It includes compaſſion for the unhappy, hatred of ſin, love of virtue, diſintereſtedneſs, ſelf-denial, induſtry, prudence, piety and devotion; yea, every thing that is excellent and amiable. It is not an empty ſound, but a ſolid virtue, or rather an aſſemblage of virtues. It is not a philoſophical parade, but a chriſtian grace; yea, a collection of graces.

Though the goſpel has not injoined the love of our country, in theſe very words, yet it has abundantly inculcated the thing itſelf. It requires us to love our neighbours, our brethren, our enemies, and all men; and to look not only at our own things, but alſo at the things of others.

2. There is a great difference between talking warmly in our country's favour, and really loving it.

A man

A man may ſay much in the praiſe of his country, its conſtitution, trade, ſoil and climate, and give it the preference to all other countries; he may plead for its rights with great earneſtneſs, and do much to ſupport its credit and reſpectability; and yet not be a real lover of it—not have any pure benevolence, any piety to God, or regard to virtue; but be influenced wholly by ambition and avarice; he may ſtill practiſe thoſe vices, which, if they ſhould generally prevail, would bring national miſery and ruin. Balaam could not be hired to curſe Iſrael. He ſaid the fineſt things of the nation.—"God hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor ſeen perverſeneſs in Iſrael. Bleſſed is every one that bleſſeth them, and curſed is every one that curſeth them." ¿Was not he a friend to God's people?—Follow him a little farther, and you will ſee. Though he would not aſſiſt their deſtruction by a prophetic execration, yet he told their enemy, how he might bring on them an efficacious curſe. He taught Balak to caſt a ſtumbling block before them, by which they would fall into fornication and idolatry. This advice was more fatal, in its conſequences, than a hundred formal execrations would have been. It was the means of involving them in ſuch guilt, as could not be expiated without the death of multitudes. Every man, who is a promoter of wickedneſs is an enemy to his country. He contributes to its diſgrace and miſery. ¿Did not Achan ſin in the accurſed thing?

thing? but that man perished not alone in his iniquity.

3. It appears from our subject, that a people, who enjoy, and profess to believe divine revelation, ought to make some stated provision for maintaining and preserving the social worship of the Deity.

This is a plain dictate of reason, as well as scripture. God made mankind to subsist in a state of society, every thing which is, in its nature, necessary to the welfare of society, must be approved by him. Every one knows, that society cannot be continued, much less be happy, without some degree of virtue, and without a general restraint on man's selfish passions and vicious inclinations. The first and principal object in every society must be, to prevent, or restrain injustice, oppression, sensuality, idleness and dissoluteness of manners; and to encourage and support righteousness, sobriety, industry, and all those virtues, which tend to the happiness of individuals, and of the community.—Now there are but two ways in which this design can be effected. It must be either by light and reason; or, by force and terror. ¿ And which is most consistent with the liberty and dignity of rational beings; to govern them by stripes and gibbets, prisons and workhouses; or, to govern them by conviction and persuasion, argument and motive? If mankind ought to be governed, not as slaves, but freemen—not as brutes, but moral agents, then provision ought to be made

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for the diffuſion of neceſſary knowledge, and eſpecially of the knowledge, of religion, which offers the grand motives to every ſocial and private virtue. There ought to be ſchools for the inſtruction and education of youth. There ought alſo to be ſome ſtanding means of more publick and general inſtruction in the great principles and duties of religion. Every one knows that the belief of the being and providence of God, and the apprehenſion of a future ſtate of retribution, are the grand principles of all virtue. And it is alſo evident, that the publick, ſocial worſhip of God is the beſt, and the only effectual mean of maintaining and diffuſing among a people this apprehenſion and belief. If then there were no ſuch thing as the goſpel, it would ſtill be the duty and intereſt of every community, to provide means for promoting the knowledge of *natural* religion; ſuch as the being and government of God, a future retribution, the nature and neceſſity of virtue, its tendency to the happineſs of ſociety and of particular perſons, and the miſerable conſequences of vice; becauſe ſuch proviſion would be a more cheap, rational and liberal way of governing mankind, than any other that can be imagined.

Civil magiſtrates have no right to dictate men's belief, or control their conſciences. But the worſhip of the Deity, and the obligations of virtue, are contrary to no man's conſcience. He who has any religion at all, acknowledges *theſe*. He who

who has no religion, and believes none, can have no conſcience in the matter.

It appears then, that the goſpel, properly ſpeaking, never coſts men any thing; for it calls them to do nothing more, than, as members of ſociety, they are bound to do; and, as good members of ſociety, they would be inclined to do, if the goſpel had never come to them.

If, in a ſocial and civil view, they would be bound to maintain publick teachers, who ſhould explain and inculcate the principles and duties of *natural* religion, ¿ What grievance is it that the goſpel requires them to maintain *chriſtian* teachers ? The goſpel inſtructs us in all thoſe truths and virtues, which belong to natural religion, and which are neceſſary to the good of ſociety in the preſent ſtate. ¿ Has it injured us in pointing out a way to heaven through a Redeemer, in promiſing pardon to ſinners on repentance, and in offering grace to help our infirmities ?

The reaſon why ſome doubt, whether civil rulers ſhould concern themſelves in the ſupport of religion, is, becauſe it is a matter which relates to men's ſouls. And indeed, conſidered ſimply in this view, it muſt be merely a matter of private judgment in which the civil powers are not to interfere. But ſo far as it relates to the good of ſociety, rulers ought to encourage and ſupport this as well as any thing elſe, which relates to the ſame end.

They who deny, that rulers have any thing to do in religious matters, will find themſelves involved

volved in abſurdity and contradiction. For, on their ground, it will follow, that there muſt be no laws againſt vice, or in favour of virtue—no laws againſt theft, oppreſſion, drunkenneſs, idleneſs and profanity; or in favour of induſtry, charity, righteouſneſs and ſobriety. For ſuch laws have relation to matters, which eſſentially concern religion. If we allow, that there may be laws to regulate our ſocial manners, we grant the whole matter in queſtion; becauſe our ſocial manners are immediately connected with religion. And if theſe are to be regulated, it will follow, that the worſhip of the Deity, the obſervance of the ſabbath, and an attendance on the acknowledged inſtitutions of heaven, are to be encouraged and ſupported; becauſe theſe are the beſt and ſureſt means of promoting ſocial virtue and happineſs.

4. If we ought to regard the intereſt of our country at large, we ought, for the ſame reaſons, to conſult the peace and happineſs of the ſmaller ſocieties of which we are members.

The ſame principles, which ought to govern nations, ought alſo to govern thoſe ſocieties, into which nations are ſubdivided. The apoſtle's inſtruction ſhould be religiouſly obſerved in all our ſocial conduct, "Let nothing be done through ſtrife, or vain glory; but, in lowlineſs of mind, let each eſteem other better than himſelf." In all communities, there will often be a diverſity of ſentiment, and a colliſion of intereſt.

Peace

Peace and happineſs will therefore depend on candor and condeſcenſion.

In civil ſociety we muſt never purſue our own ſuppoſed intereſt in a manner evidently prejudicial to the general welfare. In religious ſociety, we muſt never, in circumſtantial things, ſo ſtiffly adhere to our peculiar ſentiments, as to deprive others of the means of edification in things eſſential. For the convenience of ſocial worſhip, it is neceſſary that chriſtians ſhould be formed into particular churches. When a church is formed, the members, however divided in ſentiment about ſmaller things, ſhould, with united affection, purſue the great objects in which they are agreed; and ſhould ſo far condeſcend to one another, that they may, with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God.

If the whole ſociety is but juſt competent to the maintenance of publick worſhip, the conſequence of diviſions is, that none will enjoy the privilege. If a part inſtitute a mode of worſhip by themſelves, with an intention to exclude their brethren, they render that a burden, which to the whole united would be eaſy; and in the iſſue deprive the whole of a privilege, which all wiſh to enjoy. Let none therefore ſeek merely to pleaſe himſelf, but let every one pleaſe his neighbour for his good to edification.

5. We ſee how careful we ſhould be, that no ſelfiſh or unworthy motive influence our ſocial, or religious conduct.

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The elders of the Jews, when they aſked of Jeſus a favour for the centurion, added, "He is worthy for whom thou ſhouldſt do this, for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a ſynagogue." They expreſſed their ſenſe, that a ſpirit of benevolence, and a regard to the general intereſt of religion, were proper qualifications for divine favours. Chriſt complies with the requeſt thus urged; and by his compliance confirms the juſtneſs of the ſentiment. A man no farther acts as a member of ſociety, than he is guided by benevolence; and his devotions are no farther acceptable, than charity mingles itſelf with them. Be ye therefore ſober and watch unto prayer; and, above all things, have fervent charity among yourſelves.

THE END OF THE THIRTYEIGHTH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XXXIX.

The Influence of Religion to enlarge the Mind.

2 CORINTHIANS, VI. 13.

Now for a recompenſe in the ſame, (I ſpeak as unto my Children) be ye alſo enlarged.

OF this enlargedneſs of mind, which the apoſtle recommends to the Corinthians, he himſelf was an eminent example. All his worldly honours, intereſts and proſpects he cheerfully relinquiſhed, for the ſervice of Chriſt in preaching the goſpel of ſalvation. In the proſecution of this work, he was not confined to the places, where he found it moſt lucrative to himſelf; he rather choſe to beſtow his labour, where it ſeemed moſt neceſſary for others. In the churches of Macedonia he was received with much cordiality, and treated with ſingular kindneſs. They not only contributed to his ſup-

port while he was among them, but miniſtered to his neceſſities, when he was abſent from them. Alluding to their liberality, he ſays to the Corinthians, "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you ſervice." In Corinth, a place of great opulence, he found little of this liberal ſpirit. And ſuch was the oppoſition which he met with from falſe apoſtles, that he declined to receive the ſcanty ſupplies which were offered him. He ſays, "I have kept myſelf from being burthenſome to you, and ſo will I keep myſelf. Notwithſtanding the liberality of other churches, and the parſimony of this, he here beſtowed a great part of his labours, both in preaching and in writing. In this chapter, after a detail of his labours and ſufferings in the cauſe of the goſpel, he, with great pathos and earneſtneſs, addreſſes himſelf to his Corinthian brethren; "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you; our heart is enlarged. Ye are not ſtraitened in us; but ye are ſtraitened in your own bowels. Now for a recompenſe in the ſame, be ye alſo enlarged."

What the apoſtle here recommends is an *enlarged* mind, in oppoſition to a *ſtraitened, contracted* mind.

We will illuſtrate this *enlarged mind*, in its nature and operations: And then ſhew the proper *means* of obtaining it.

I. The nature and operations of an *enlarged mind* are firſt to be conſidered.

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The apoſtle evidently intends, by the phraſe, ſome eminent meaſure of a virtuous and holy temper.

1. The chriſtian of an enlarged mind entertains comprehenſive and connected ideas of the religion of the goſpel, and regards the ſeveral parts of it, according to their comparative uſefulneſs and importance.

There are ſome, who profeſs a zeal for religion, but confine their zeal to a few particular things, to certain favourite ſentiments and uſages; and theſe not the moſt important in the chriſtian ſcheme, if they in any ſenſe belong to it. Among many of the primitive believers an attachment to the rites and ceremonies, in which they had been educated, almoſt excluded benevolence and charity to their more liberal brethren. On this account, the apoſtle calls them weak in faith—babes in Chriſt. They might have honeſt intentions, but they had not conſiſtent ideas of the nature of the goſpel.

The enlarged chriſtian imbibes his religious ſentiments freſh and pure from the deep fountain of divine truth, not from the ſhallow, variable ſtream of human opinion. Regarding the Deity as the great object to which all religion is directed, he proves what is acceptable to him.

Contemplating the perfect character of God, he concludes, that all religion muſt conſiſt in rectitude of heart and holineſs of life—that love to him, and benevolence to men muſt be its leading principles—and that to purify the heart, and

promote the works of righteouſneſs, muſt be the great end of all the doctrines and inſtitutions of the goſpel. He deſpiſes not the leaſt command; but he principally attends to the things which make the ſubſtance of religion; and, in ſubſervience to theſe, he honors every ordinance which he finds to be ſanctioned by divine authority.

2. The enlarged chriſtian, in matters of religion, judges *freely* and *independently*.

There are ſome, who, with unthinking indolence, take their religious ſentiments as they are dictated by others. In oppoſition to this implicit credulity, our Saviour ſays, "Call no man your Father on earth, for one is your Father, who is in heaven." An attention is due to the opinions of wiſe and good men. But we are to give no man dominion over our faith. The Bereans were commended, becauſe they received, with all readineſs of mind, the doctrines taught by the apoſtles, and ſearched the ſcriptures daily, whether theſe things were ſo.

The chriſtian of a large and liberal mind will not receive doctrines, as the commandments of men; nor, on the other hand, will he cavil and object againſt them, to ſhew his ſuperiority to the opinions of men. The latter diſcovers as much pride and ſelfconceit, as the former diſcovers indolence and careleſſneſs; and it is difficult to ſay, which is moſt inconſiſtent with an open and generous ſoul.

3. The enlarged mind yields an unreſerved ſubmiſſion to the divine government.

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To the man, whose views are contracted within himself, the ways of God are subjects of daily complaint. As he has no higher aim than his own worldly interest, so he has no higher wish, than to find that providence makes him its favorite. Disappointments vex him, poverty mortifies him, the prosperity of others torments him; for he sees no reason, why they should be more happy, and more successful than himself.

The man of an enlarged heart contemplates the ways of God on a more extensive scale. He does not consider himself as the only object of the divine care, nor the present life as the only term of his existence, nor this world as made and governed merely for his use. He looks up to God as a Being of unsearchable wisdom and unbounded goodness, whose government extends to all creatures, and whose designs reach forward to the remotest ages of futurity. He believes that there is a secret connexion in all God's dispensations, and feels himself incompetent to judge what will best promote the general interest, or even his own. He considers, that the temporary evils, which *he* suffers, may be productive of lasting good to *others*; that the worldly prosperity, which he sometimes desires, might, if granted, operate to the prejudice of many; and that his present afflictions may, in ways unknown and unsuspected, turn to his own eternal benefit. He therefore acquiesces in all the allotments of providence, and rejoices that his interests are in better hands than his own.

4. The enlarged chriſtian is of a *humble* mind. The man of a narrow, illiberal heart thinks highly of his own worth, is tenacious of his own opinions, and devoted to his own intereſt. Vainly puffed up with a fleſhly mind, he aſſumes airs of importance, magnifies his own works, and depreciates the virtues of others. But the man of enlarged and liberal ſentiments thinks ſoberly, ſpeaks modeſtly and walks humbly. He conſiders himſelf as only a ſingle being in the immenſe creation of God. Contemplating the infinity of the Creator, the extent and variety of his works, and the countleſs myriads of ſuperior intelligences, which wait around him, he ſinks into nothing in his own eſtimation. Yea; when he recollects the many inſtances of eminent virtue and wiſdom, which have appeared among the human race, he dares not exalt himſelf above his fellow mortals; but is rather diſpoſed to think others better than himſelf. From an enlarged view of the Creator and his works, the pious Pſalmiſt was led to the moſt abaſing thoughts of man. "¿ O Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who haſt ſet thy glory above the heavens? When I conſider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and ſtars, which thou haſt ordained. ¿ What is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the Son of man, that thou viſiteſt him?"

Influenced by this ſpirit of humility, the chriſtian reveres the word of revelation, and receives with ſubmiſſion its heavenly inſtructions. Every high thing within him, which exalts itſelf againſt

againſt the knowledge of God is brought low, and every thought is captivated to the obedience of Chriſt. He values the counſels of his friends, and liſtens to their faithful reproofs; and is ever ready, on conviction, to change his ſentiments, and amend his conduct; to retract his errors and confeſs his faults.

5. The enlarged heart is a *benevolent* heart.

"We are poor," ſays the apoſtle, "yet make many rich; we have nothing, yet poſſeſs all things—our heart is enlarged."

He, whoſe feelings are contracted within himſelf, views with indifference the misfortunes of a neighbour, he rather watches to make ſome advantage from them, than ſtudies how to relieve them. But the enlarged chriſtian conſiders all men as his fellow creatures, partakers of the ſame nature, and ſubject to the ſame ſenſations with himſelf. From what he ſuffers, he realizes what they ſuffer in ſimilar circumſtances. It is one of his higheſt pleaſures to abate the miſeries, and advance the happineſs of thoſe around him. Every act of beneficence to the needy returns back to himſelf bringing the reward of homefelt ſatisfaction.

His goodneſs is not confined to friends and favorites, to this religious ſect, or that political party; but extends to all as there is opportunity. Like the good Samaritan, he can ſhew mercy to the diſtreſſed, though they are of another nation, and of a different religion; yea, though, in time paſt, they have been his enemies.

He can do good to thoſe from whom he expects no recompenſe; for he looks for his recompenſe in the gratification of his own benevolence, and in the approbation of his God.

Among his fellow chriſtians he maintains an obliging candour. Conſcious of imperfection in himſelf, he looks for perfection in none; and ſenſible of his need of candour from his brethren, he ſhews that they may expect it from him. He will not haſtily condemn them for every error in ſentiment, or renounce communion with them for every diverſity of uſage; but wherein he finds them agreeing with him, he will walk by the ſame rule; and wherein they are differently minded, he prays that God will reveal even this unto them.

He will not reſent every inadvertent action or expreſſion, though it may ſeem exceptionable; but will make allowance for the common infirmities of human nature, and for the peculiar weakneſſes and temptations of particular perſons.

Real injuries he can forgive on moderate terms. And knowing how forward ſelflove is to magnify the injuries which it receives, and to palliate thoſe which it commits, he is careful, in caſes of variance, not to ſtate too high the conditions of peace.

He can ſacrifice his own intereſt to the ſuperior happineſs of his fellow men, like ſaint Paul, who ſought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be ſaved.

He does not view as loſt all the bleſſings, which are diſperſed among the human race, nor wiſh to

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graſp them with his own hands. He deſires the happineſs of all men, and with pleaſure beholds his fellow creatures rejoicing under the ſmiles of providence. His neighbour's fruitful field and plentiful harveſt, peaceful manſion and contented aſpect, refreſh and cheer his heart. He takes a ſenſible ſhare in the bleſſings, which they enjoy, and is happy in their proſperity.

He readily acknowledges the kindneſſes which are done him. He can more eaſily forgive an injury, than forget a favour. Injuries, he knows, may proceed from accident, inadvertence, or tranſient paſſion, without ſettled malice or deliberate intention; but favours are uſually the effects of a kind and friendly diſpoſition; and the ſmalleſt kindneſs done with good will, is rather to be acknowledged, than the greateſt injury done by accident, is to be reſented. The enlarged mind marks this difference; and while it paſſes over many injuries without ſerious reſentment, it will let no favour ſtand unnoticed.

The man of enlarged views cultivates a good opinion of mankind. When he thinks moſt favourably of them, he beſt enjoys himſelf. Their virtues he had rather notice than their failings. For the former he gives them full credit; the latter he wiſhes to extenuate and excuſe.

Perverſe as mankind are, he finds, that, while he acts well himſelf, he can, for the moſt part, live peacably with them. And bad as the world is, he, in the courſe of his buſineſs, meets more

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honeſt men than knaves; and is oftener treated with juſtice, than defrauded of his rights.

If he is ſometimes defamed, yet while he provides things honeſt in the ſight of all men, his character is generally ſafe. He is oftener commended for worthy actions, than ſlandered for ſuſpected faults.

How much ſoever ſome complain of their neighbours, every man finds it better to live in ſociety, than in ſolitude. No man chooſes to retire from the world, and confine himſelf to a hermitage. Every one therefore muſt be preſumed to receive more good than evil from thoſe around him.

The man of a large and liberal mind, thus viewing the ſtate of the world, and the diſpoſitions of mankind, embraces in the arms of his benevolence the whole human race, and thoſe eſpecially with whom he has intercourſe and connexion: He does good as he has oportunity; and the good which he receives, he thankfully remembers and cheerfully requites.

Theſe are the operations of a heart enlarged.

II. We propoſed, in the ſecond place, to conſider the proper means of obtaining and improving this liberality and largeneſs of mind.

1. The firſt thing, which here offers itſelf to our thoughts, is an intimate acquaintance with the holy ſcriptures.

All moral excellency and mental improvement have their foundation in knowledge. It is not, however, any and every kind of knowledge that will

will enlarge the mind. One may indulge his curiosity in prying into the affairs of his neighbours, and the secret transactions of families; he may studiously acquaint himself with a thousand trifles which have no relation to his duty as a christian, or his business as a man; and after all his frivolous acquisitions, be more straitened and contracted than he was before. The knowledge which enlarges the soul, is that which is great in its object, and useful in its tendency.

In this view the reading of history is very important, especially to the young. Thus they recall the years, which have gone by, and bring past events to be present. They run back to distant ages, converse with those who lived on this globe long before *they* had a being. They learn what were the sentiments, manners and pursuits of men, thousands of years ago; see the gradual progress of arts and civilization; perceive the difference between the rude ages of antiquity, and the periods of modern refinement; and contemplate human nature in its various forms and attitudes. Hence they discern plain proofs of a governing Providence, gain conviction of human depravity, remark the absurdities of heathen mythology, and are led to conclude the necessity of divine revelation in order to just and rational sentiments of God and religion.

But there is no reading so immediately conducive to the enlargement of the mind, as that of the holy scriptures.

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We all have this book in our hands, have early been accuſtomed to read it, have been taught ſome of its contents from our cradles, and we forget its ſacred importance. If it had come to us ſuddenly, as a new diſcovery, and with the ſanction of divine authority, we ſhould open it with eagerneſs, and read it with aſtoniſhment.

The idea of a book dictated by the inſpiration of God, for the inſtruction of mortals, is a grand and noble conception. It leads us to view the Deity as a Being of wonderful condeſcenſion; and mankind as ſuſtaining an important rank among his creatures.

The matters contained in this volume are the moſt intereſting that can be imagined.

The ſubjects of common hiſtory are often entertaining and affecting; but compared with ſome of the ſubjects which the bible exhibits to us, they appear ſmall and trifling.

Vulgar hiſtory gives us the character of kings and emperors, ſtateſmen and heroes, and details to us their great actions, and mighty atchievements. But the ſcriptures exhibit the character, and deſcribe the government of that infinite, eternal, all perfect Being, before whom princes are nothing, and the judges of the earth are vanity.

Hiſtory relates the riſe and fall, the changes and revolutions of ſtates and kingdoms. But the ſcriptures inform us, how worlds roſe out of chaos into being and order; and how they will, in ſome future period, be diſſolved, and paſs away.

Hiſtory

Hiſtory gives us an account of the firſt ſettlement and gradual population of particular countries. But the Bible has choſen a grander theme. It teaches us the firſt beginning, and the early increaſe of the human race, and the manner in which the world was peopled from one created pair. Yea, it riſes above this globe; it aſcends to the ſkies; it brings us intelligence of important things in the inviſible world; ſuch as the creation, offices and employments of angels and ſpirits, the apoſtaſy of multitudes of theſe ſuperior beings, the condition into which they are fallen, and the end to which they are reſerved.

Hiſtory informs us of great changes, which have happened in particular countries, by means of foreign invaſions, or internal rebellions. But the ſcriptures inſtruct us, how our whole race have departed from God, and what is the awful conſequence of this univerſal defection. They, at the ſame time, diſcover to us a divine Saviour, who aſſumed human fleſh, appeared in this world, exhibited a pattern of virtue, taught a ſyſtem of important truths, died a ſacrifice for the guilt of men, and roſe from the dead as the firſt fruits of a general reſurrection, and a pledge of eternal life to them who believe.

Hiſtory gives us a deſcription of the earth, the genius of its inhabitants, the produce of its climates, and the policies of its kingdoms. But the book of God diſcovers to us a world, which moral eye hath not ſeen. It deſcribes the riches and glories of the heavenly ſtate, the employments of

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its inhabitants, and the qualifications neceſſary to our obtaining a ſettlement among them.

If any knowledge is of uſe to elevate the mind, the knowledge of the ſcriptures is the moſt uſeful; for theſe bring to us things of the higheſt nature and moſt intereſting conſequence—things which relate, not to particular nations or ages only; but to the world—to other worlds—to all mankind in all the ages of eternity.

2. That we may be enlarged, it is neceſſary that we ſubmit to the power of the goſpel, and feel its influence on our hearts.

Knowledge is highly uſeful; but this alone will rather ſwell, than enlarge the mind. It is charity which edifies.

We often ſee men of learned education, and extenſive knowledge, who are ſtill contracted in their views, and illiberal in their ſentiments. And we ſometimes ſee men of moderate erudition, who diſcover an amiable generoſity and openneſs of mind. The former have ſought knowledge for worldly ends, and devoted their acquirements to the low purpoſes of ambition and covetouſneſs. The latter have ſtudied the goſpel of Chriſt, that they might underſtand its nature and feel its influence; and their knowledge has made them better men—more humble in their thoughts of themſelves—more liberal in their ſentiments of their fellow chriſtians—and more benevolent to all men.

The inſufficiency of knowledge alone, and the efficacy of real religion to enlarge the mind, we

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ſee in the apoſtle Paul. Let us view this man in the two different periods of his life; the one before, and the other after, he became a chriſtian.

Paul was a man of ſuperior natural abilities, and literary accompliſhments. He received as good an education as his country afforded. He was converſant with the writings of Moſes and the prophets. He was well acquainted with the rites and forms of his religion, and with the ancient predictions concerning a Saviour to come. And from ſeveral paſſages in his writings it appears, that he had read the moſt celebrated poets and philoſophers. But with all his fine talents and diſtinguiſhed knowledge, Paul was ſtill a bigot. He had an illiberal contracted ſpirit. He gloried in his Hebrew blood, in his deſcent from Abraham, in his circumciſion on the appointed day, in his phariſean principles, and in his ſtrict obſervance of the legal ceremonies; and on theſe grounds he built his hopes of ſalvation. He had a zeal for religion, but it was a fierce, unmerciful zeal; a zeal which ſtimulated him to perſecute the church of Chriſt and waſte it. The ſalvation of God he limited to his own country—to his own proud ſect. The reſt of mankind he conſigned over to deſtruction. His ſoul, thus contracted by pride, ſelfconceit and falſe zeal, could not receive the rays of divine light, which ſhone around him. The benevolent doctrines of Jeſus had no charms to captivate his darkened mind. The miracles of the Son of God had no

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power to convince his obſtinate heart. He breathed out threatening and ſlaughter againſt the diſciples of the Lord.

Paul, in the height of his perſecuting rage, was arreſted by a divine hand. Such glaring evidence was poured in upon him, as overcame his prejudices, and convinced him, that the goſpel was from heaven. He received it as divinely excellent, and bowed to its authority.

From this time you ſee him quite a different man. His mind is enlarged by the religion, which he has embraced, and all his conduct ſpeaks the benevolence of his heart.

He no longer conſiders God, as the God of Jews only: He adores him as the God of Gentiles, as rich in mercy to all who call upon him, and as governing the world without reſpect of perſons. He believes that the Meſſiah came, not to exalt Jews to dominion over other nations; but to bring ſalvation to a guilty world. He now can ſacrifice all his temporal proſpects to the ſpiritual intereſt of his fellow men, not ſeeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be ſaved. He reckons not his own life dear to himſelf, that he may fulfil the miniſtry appointed him, and finiſh his courſe with joy. What things were gain to him, theſe now he eſteems loſs for Chriſt. While he keeps under his body, leſt he ſhould be a caſtaway, he is made all things to all men, that he may by all means ſave ſome. All his preaching breathes condeſcenſion

ſcenſion and goodneſs. There is nothing in it to encourage ſtiffneſs and obſtinacy among chriſtians; but every thing to mollify the paſſions, ſweeten the ſpirits and ſmooth the manners. He entertains the moſt liberal views of the purpoſes of God's grace. The grace manifeſted in *his* converſion, he celebrates in terms of high admiration, becauſe it was deſigned, not for his ſake only, but rather for the general good of mankind. He gives thanks for the ſucceſs of the goſpel in particular places; becauſe hence the riches of God's grace would be known in places remote, and in ages to come. He admires the diſpenſation of divine mercy to guilty men; becauſe hereby the manifold wiſdom of God would be more clearly ſeen in heavenly places. He regards all men, and all moral beings, as one family, one grand community, under Jeſus their head. He wiſhes to ſee chriſtians all united in love, and ſtudying the things which make for the common ſalvation.

That which made ſo mighty a change in Paul, was the cordial reception of the goſpel. As ſoon as this began to operate in his heart, his views were enlarged—his proſpects were extended—his benevolence ſtretched wider and wider its arms, until it embraced the whole ſyſtem of rational creatures. The man, who like Paul, would enlarge his mind, muſt not content himſelf with a cold, ſpeculative belief of the goſpel;

but cultivate in his heart the ſpirit and genius of Chriſt's religion.

3. The enlargement of the mind depends much on ſocial intercourſe, eſpecially on ſocial worſhip.

He who withdraws himſelf from the world, will be apt to think of his fellow men worſe than they deſerve. The prophet Elijah, in his gloomy cave, pronounced all men his enemies, and grew weary of life. God calls him to come forth, mingle with mankind, and attend the duties of his office; aſſuring him, that, corrupt as the nation was, there were many good men remaining. Abraham, before he converſed with the people of Gerar, thought ſurely the fear of God was not in that place; but, on acquaintance, he found in it piety enough to rebuke *his* miſconduct.

By performing the duties of ſocial life, we ſtrengthen and improve the ſocial affections. In converſing with mankind, we meet with many agreeable characters; ſee many worthy actions; receive many inſtructive ſentiments, which, otherwiſe, would have eſcaped our notice. By the reciprocal exchange of good offices we become intereſted in each other's happineſs.

In this view, *religious* ſociety is of great utility. When chriſtians ſtatedly aſſemble together to invoke the ſame Father, in the name of the ſame Mediator, and unite their voices in imploring the ſame bleſſings, each for his fellow worſhipers, as well as for himſelf, they conſider themſelves

ſelves as a fraternity, all ſtanding in the ſame relation to God, and all related to one another. Feeling each other's wants, and rejoicing in each other's proſperity, they almoſt forget the diſtinctions of intereſt. The church of Chriſt is one; all particular churches are members of the ſame general community; and all ſhould endeavour to keep the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace, and by love ſerve one another.

The breaſt, in which chriſtian love dwells, muſt be enlarged. There is no place for it with thoſe who are ſtraitened in their own bowels; for this affection does not confine its regards to a particular ſect or ſociety, it embraces all churches of the ſaints.

Nothing is more inconſiſtent with enlargedneſs of heart, than a cuſtomary neglect of ſocial worſhip. It has often been obſerved, that they who withdraw from the aſſemblies of the ſaints, contract an unſocial ſourneſs toward mankind, a ſuſpicious diſtruſt of their neighbours, and diſaffection to thoſe around them; or elſe they run into ſentiments of infidelity and irreligion.

And it is obvious to every one, that thoſe chriſtians, who, either through miſtaken zeal, or accidental diſguſt, ſeparate from their brethren, and form new ſects, ſoon loſe that liberality and enlargedneſs of heart, which are among the beauties and glories of religion. They perſuade themſelves to believe, and allow themſelves to ſpeak, of their fellow chriſtians, many unkind and unfavourable things, which, if they would mingle

with them, they would know to be without foundation.

Honeſt chriſtians may think differently. But, if once they begin to magnify their differences into cauſes of diſunion, they will ſoon come to condemn, perhaps to hate one another. Let them walk together, hand in hand, and maintain fellowſhip in the things in which they are agreed; and they will eaſily ſee that the things in which they differ are but ſmall, compared with the other.

The animoſities between different ſects of chriſtians are much increaſed by their ſtanding at a diſtance. If they would mingle in the civil and religious life, they would ſee, that religion is not confined to any one ſect, but may be found in others, as well as their own.

4. *Prayer* is of great uſe to enlarge the mind. This is a ſacred converſe with God. It is the opening of our deſires and feelings to him. It is an exerciſe well adapted to raiſe our hearts above this world, and elevate our affections to divine and heavenly objects. ¿ Will the chriſtian, who has been employed in communion with his God, immediately return to the vanities and follies of the world? ¿ Will he at once forget where he has been, what he has been doing, and the high privilege, which he has enjoyed? By a regular devotion, we ſet God always before us, and live in his preſence. ¿ How grand and ſolemn the thought, that we are ſurrounded with the Deity, and filled with his fulneſs—that his eyes obſerves

ſerves our ways, and his counſel guides our ſteps —that his ear attends our requeſts, and his bounty ſupplies our wants ?

Converſe with God ſuppoſes a belief of his providence. If we believe that he is good to us, we muſt believe that he is alſo good to others. And if our fellow men are objects of his care, as well as we, they ought to be objects of our benevolence, as well as we of theirs.

From that univerſal providence, which prayer acknowledges, we are led to view all men as our brethren, belonging to the ſame houſehold with us. We are taught that we muſt pray for all men, for this is acceptable in the ſight of God our Saviour. We muſt then wiſh well to all; otherwiſe our prayers will contradict the ſentiments of our hearts.

Thus prayer enlarges the ſoul, exalts our thoughts of God and his providence, and extends the circle of our benevolence to all his creatures.

From what has been ſaid, we ſee that many have miſtaken ideas of real greatneſs of mind.

¿ Do you imagine, that you diſcover an enlarged ſoul, when you throw off the fear of God and a future judgment—when you trample on the precepts and ſpurn the threatenings of ſcripture—when you deſpiſe what your ſerious neighbours revere—when you ſet up your reaſon in oppoſition to revelation, and your humour in oppoſition to divine inſtitutions ? ¿ Do you call it greatneſs of mind, to riſe into high reſentment

for trifling wrongs—to utter paſſionate language when you receive an offence—to revenge an injury and revile an enemy?—You greatly miſtake the matter. Piety and ſubmiſſion to God, humility and modeſty in your language and deportment, meekneſs and condeſcenſion when offences happen, goodneſs and benevolence to all men; theſe are the things which indicate an enlarged mind. Pride, paſſion, revenge, precipitancy and contentious zeal, diſcover a low, ſmall, contracted ſoul. The glory and greatneſs of the divine character are goodneſs and mercy. The dignity of man is likeneſs to God.

Our ſubject teaches us, that the goſpel is a moſt noble inſtitution, wherever it comes with power, it mends the heart and adorns the life; makes men more uſeful to others, more agreeable in all relations, more capable of enjoying themſelves. If any man be in Chriſt, he is a new creature.

We learn farther, that the goſpel bears plain marks of a divine original. Wherever it produces its proper effect, it enlarges the heart, elevates the affections, inſpires with unbounded benevolence, and makes men like to God. So divine a religion muſt have a divine original. Wiſdom, ſo pure and peaceable, ſo full of mercy and good fruits, muſt be wiſdom from above.

He who believes, has the witneſs in himſelf. Having experienced the transforming power of

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the gospel on his own heart, he feels an unwavering conviction that it is from God.

The man, who rejects the gospel of Christ, as a human invention, has never known its divine efficacy. He is a stranger to that humility, meekness, condescension, benevolence and heavenliness, which it uniformly inculcates, and in which greatness of mind consists. The more the soul is enlarged, the more it will be delivered from, and secured against, sceptical thoughts.

You who complain of doubts and unbelief, sit down and enquire, ¿ Whether you have ever submitted to the government of Christ's religion? If you regard it only as a matter of speculation, no wonder that the tempter throws doubts in your way. If you regard it as matter of practice, and cultivate the temper of it in your hearts, you will feel its excellence and importance. Continue in Christ's word, and you are his disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

THE END OF THE THIRTYNINTH SERMON.

SERMON XL.

The Changing Nature of worldly Things.

2. CORINTHIANS, vii. 31.

——*The faſhion of this World paſſeth away.*

THE mutable and tranſient nature of all things around us, is here adduced as an argument againſt depreſſion in adverſity, and exultation in proſperity, eagerneſs in our worldly purſuits, and anxiety about future events. "The time is ſhort," ſays the apoſtle, "it remaineth, that they who weep, be as if they wept not; they who rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; they who buy, as if they poſſeſſed not; they who uſe the world, as not abuſing it: *For the faſhion of this world paſſeth away.*"

To illuſtrate and improve this thought, is the deſign of the preſent diſcourſe.

All

All things around us are changing.

The visible heavens daily vary their appearance, and present to us different scenes. The stars, which now exhibit themselves to our view, are not the same which a few months ago, adorned our evening hemisphere; but another assemblage, which have come in their place, and which will again give place to them. The moon, from evening to evening, changes her face: At one time she appears full orbed, and soon hides herself in darkness.

The sun approaches us with his lively beams and gives us summer; then, retiring to the other pole, he leaves us to feel our dependence on his friendly visits, and to realize how intolerable would be our state if he should too long delay his return.

Spring and summer, autumn and winter, walk their rounds, and follow each other in close succession. None of them abide with us long. Each in his turn just appears, makes a transient visit, and, stepping forward on his way, gives room to the next.

In every season we experience a great variety in the temperature of the air, the course and strength of the winds, and the aspect of the skies. Cool winds mitigate the fierce heat of the summer's sun; and warm breezes, now and then, soften the rigor of the winter's frost. Thus each season is comfortable in its mean, and tolerable in its extremes.

Nature

Nature is continually diverſifying her dreſs. We ſee her at one time, clothed with verdure, and enriched with fruitage; then deſpoiled of her ornaments and treaſures, veiled with ſnow, and deformed with froſt.

For a few months ſhe teems with life; the groves and fields, the graſs and flowers, the very air, all are peopled with living myriads. Theſe, for a few days, play in the ſummer's beams: "But God hides his face, and they are troubled: He takes away their breath, and they die and return to their duſt. Again he ſendeth forth his ſpirit, and they are created: He reneweth the face of the earth."

Time makes obſervable changes in the ſurface of our globe. By the waſhing of rains, mountains are waſting and valleys are filling. By ſubterraneous winds and fires, new mountains are heaved up, and new valleys are ſunk. In one place, the land encroaches on the ſea; in another, the ſea makes inroads on the land. By the power of tempeſts and tides, iſlands are united to continents, and continents are diſmembered to form new iſlands. Rivers and ſtreams forſake their old beds, and force new channels. Foreſts decay in one place, and grow up in another; and, in a tract of time, a different ſpecies ſucceeds in the place where the old foreſt was deſtroyed.

Every age introduces great alterations in the bounds of empires, in the political and commercial intereſts of nations, in their forms of government,

ment, in their enmities and friendſhips. In our own country, ¿ What a vaſt extent of wilderneſs has been populated within a few years? ¿ How prodigiouſly have our numbers increaſed? ¿ How wonderfully have arts, commerce and learning been improved? ¿ What an aſtoniſhing revolution have we ſeen? The ſtate of Europe is alſo much changed, and ſtill is changing. A few years may perhaps produce far greater alterations, than have yet taken place. The day is coming, "when iniquity will have an end, and the profane and wicked prince will be put down. The crown will be taken from his head, and the diadem will be removed. And God will exalt him that is low, and abaſe him that is high. The government of nations he will overturn, overturn, overturn; and it ſhall be no more, until he come whoſe right it is, and it ſhall be given to him."

Families, as well as nations, are changing. New ones are forming as elder ones paſs away. They remain not long at a ſtand; when they have reached their growth, they ſoon begin to decline. Some of the members are removed by death; and others are ſcattered, here and there, to form new houſeholds. Some families, in two or three generations, are multiplied into a number; others are extinguiſhed.

The lands which have been acquired, and the property which has been accumulated, by the prudence, induſtry and enterpriſe of the proprietor, are often alienated by the misfortune, or folly of the deſcendants. Eſtates rarely continue

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long in the ſame line, or in the ſame name. What is collected by the hands of one, is diſperſed by the next hands into which it falls. No man can enſure to his poſterity the acquiſitions of his own induſtry; nor can he tell who ſhall be after him. Riches are often kept for the owners to their hurt, and thoſe riches periſh by evil travel.

The condition of every perſon is in continual mutation. We come into the world helpleſs and dependent: We increaſe in ſtature, ſtrength and underſtanding, until we attain to our maturity: Soon we begin to decline in all our powers: We return to the weakneſs of infancy, and ſink into the duſt.

As we advance in life, our views and apprehenſions of men and things, and our taſte and inclination for the objects around us, greatly alter. The things which we reliſhed in youth, we deſpiſe when we come to manhood. The pleaſures of our mature age become inſipid in our declining years. In the world to come, all earthly intereſts and purſuits will alike be objects of our contempt.

The inhabitants of the world are changing. The rational beings who people it now, a few years ago had not an exiſtence; and thoſe who will people it a few years hence, have not an exiſtence now. The race of mortals is like the river, which rolls by us. From year to year, it has the ſame general appearance, is bounded nearly by the ſame banks, flows in the ſame courſe,

courſe, and is called by the ſame name: But the water is continued by ſucceſſion: That which paſſes by us this hour, is not the ſame which paſſed an hour ago, or will paſs an hour hence. So changes the ſtream of *human* ſucceſſion. Every hour ſome of our mortal race are paſſing away, and others are coming forward, to follow them down the current into that boundleſs ocean, where all will, by and by, be abſorbed.

There is a mighty change which awaits us all; a change which generations before us have experienced, and which is appointed for thoſe who are coming after us. We are to paſs from this world, where we now live, where we were born and have grown up, where we have formed connexions, contracted friendſhips, and acquired property; and we are to enter into another world widely different from this; a world which we have never ſeen, and of which we have had but inperfect information; a world to which many of our friends have gone, but from which none have returned to tell us what it is. There we muſt exiſt in a new manner, and amidſt new connexions. Our bodies we muſt leave behind, for a while, to receive them in ſome diſtant period, new made, and differently faſhioned. In the mean time, we ſhall live unbodied ſpirits, and among ſpirits, like us, unbodied. Our views, actions and communications will be ſuch as are proper to ſpirits, and ſuch as beings, in this groſs ſtate of fleſh, cannot clearly apprehend. This change will be more important than all preceding

ing ones. The change, from a world known to a world unknown; from an exiſtence in bodies, to an exiſtence without bodies, is inconceivably great. But there is a circumſtance in our final change far greater ſtill. It removes us from a ſtate of probation to a ſtate of retribution, where we ſhall enjoy complete happineſs without fear of loſs, or ſuffer extreme miſery without hope of deliverance. As the inhabitants of the world, ſo the world itſelf is paſſing away. The heavens and the earth, which are now, are kept in ſtore, reſerved unto fire, againſt the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men. The day of the Lord will come: Then the heavens ſhall depart as a ſcroll, when it is rolled together, and every mountain and iſland ſhall be removed out of their places, and the earth and the works which are therein ſhall be burnt up. Nevertheleſs, we, according to his promiſe, look for new heavens, and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteouſneſs.

Let us now improve the ſentiment, which we have been illuſtrating.

1. The mutable condition of the world may lead us to contemplate the immutability of the Creator. "The heavens and the earth ſhall periſh, but he ſhall endure. They ſhall wax old as a garment, and as a veſture ſhall they be changed; but he is the ſame, and of his years there is no end." It is the nature of the world, to be mutable. It is the will of the Creator, that the faſhion of it ſhould paſs away. One uſe of

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the changes which we see, is to remind us of the unchangeableness of him, by whom all things were made.

These changes prove the existence of one eternal, independent, allperfect Being. The order with which they are guided, and the ends to which they are directed, shew them to be the effects, not of blind chance, but of unerring wisdom. ¿ Is it by chance, that the moon waxes and wanes—that the sun approaches and declines—that the seasons follow each other in succession, and give variety to the face of nature—that the numerous tribes of creatures are supplied, and that the millions, which perish at the approach of winter, revive with the returning spring? ¿ Is it by chance that revolutions take place in states and kingdoms—that small causes are productive of vast and stupendous events—and that the counsels of men are defeated by disproportionate means?

The harmony which we behold in the changes of the natural world, and the good effects, which, contrary to human expectation, we often see produced by changes in the political world, are demonstrations, that an infinite, all perfect Being presides in the universe, and directs all changes and events.

This Being must himself be unchangeable. His nature and happiness are not affected by the vicissitudes of time, nor his throne shaken by the convulsions of the world. With him is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. As he is possessed

ſeſſed of all perfections, there can be no addition to his glory and felicity. As he is infinite and independent, there can be no diminution of his dignity and excellence. As he has an unlimited knowledge of all things, there can be no change of his purpoſes and deſigns. As he is above all, none can reſtrain his power, or control his will.

When we ſee all things around us changing, and feel ourſelves partaking in the general mutability of the creatures, it is matter of high conſolation, that the Being, who governs the world, is ever the ſame, and that all changes among the creatures are under his direction. "He looketh down from the height of his ſanctuary; from heaven doth he behold the earth. He heareth the groaning of the afflicted, and regardeth the prayer of the deſtitute. The children of his ſervants ſhall continue, and their ſeed ſhall be eſtabliſhed before him. He changeth not, therefore we are not conſumed. His compaſſions fail not, they are new every morning; great is his faithfulneſs."

2. In the changes of the world we may ſee much of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God.

The mutability of things, though it cauſes ſome pain, is on the whole, a ſource of enjoyment. We are formed to love variety. If only one undiverſified ſcene was continually preſented to us, it would ſoon loſe all its power to pleaſe, and life itſelf would become a burden.

The traveller, paſſing over a ſmooth and level plain, where, all along, a train of ſimilar objects

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meets his eyes, ſoon finds the ſcene growing dull and tedious. He is impatient for a change. He longs for the riſing hill, and the ſinking vale; the ragged cliff, and the flowing ſtream; the wild foreſt, and the cultivated field. A varied motion reſts his body, and a diverſified landſcape charms his imagination. Equally wearifome would be our journey through life, if nothing new occurred on the road.

Let a man chooſe his own condition. Let him be placed in the moſt agreeable circumſtances, that he can imagine. Let him have as much wealth and honour, as many friends, and as pleaſing companions, as he can wiſh. And now let his condition be fixed, and remain exactly the ſame, without any poſſible change—¿ Will he enjoy it?—He cannot enjoy it for a ſingle week. There muſt be ſomething new, or every pleaſure flattens and becomes inſipid. Stretched on a bed of down, we ſoon grow reſtleſs, and turn from ſide to ſide.

As our pleaſures are heightened, ſo our pains are mitigated, by variety. In the roughеſt roads that we travel, we meet with ſome ſmooth way, where we can walk with eaſe; and in the ſteepeſt aſcents that we climb, there are places where we may ſit down and reſt.

Many are the troubles of the world; but they are intermixed with pleaſures. And our troubles are not always the ſame; one paſſes away, as another comes. The burden does not continually preſs on the ſame part. We find ſome relief

by ſhifting it from ſhoulder to ſhoulder. The chriſtian finds more effectual ſupport in the perſuaſion, that this troublous ſcene is but preparatory to a happier ſtate, where all the changes will be only variety of good.

3. The tranſient faſhion of the world, and the mutable condition of man, direct our thoughts to a future ſtate of exiſtence.

One change leads to another. There is a connexion in the chain of events. Each ſeaſon is preparatory to the next. Summer and autumn provide for winter: Winter diſpoſes the earth for the culture of ſummer. Youth is preparatory to manhood, and this to old age. We may naturally then conclude, that death is introductory to a new ſtate of exiſtence. All previous changes ſtand in connexion with ſomething elſe; ¿ Shall we imagine that ſo great a change as death, is indifferent and unconnected? Our ſight is bounded by the grave, but the chain is ſtill extended. Pain, in this ſtate, uſually precedes high enjoyment; the humiliating circumſtances of death are preludes to glory and immortality.

In ſpring we behold nature reviving from the dreary ſtate of winter, and aſſuming new life and vigour. This change is emblematical of the general reviviſcence of the human race. ¿ What is the ſpring, but a reſurrection of nature from the grave? ¿ May not men as well be raiſed? ¿ May he not riſe in a ſuperior form, and to a nobler exiſtence? The contemptible worm, which crawls on the ground, and lives on the weed,

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ſoon dies, and, incruſted in his own ſhell, lies ſenſeleſs and inactive. But he is not confined here; he burſts the ſhell, ſtarts forth a ſuperior creature, wings the air, and ſips the flowers of the field. ¿ May not man, who is now nouriſhed from the duſt, and is returning to the duſt, come forth immortal and incorruptible, riſe to a ſuperior world, exiſt in a nobler manner, and drink of pleaſures untaſted here? All things point to another world, and remind us, that for the holy and virtuous there is a ſtate far better than this.

4. As the faſhion of the world is paſſing away, it becomes us, under the moſt agreeable proſpects, to rejoice as if we rejoiced not.

If, in our proſperity, we imagine, that we ſhall never be moved, we forget what we are, and in what a world we live. When our mountain ſeems to ſtand ſtrong, let us remember, that it is God's hand, which holds it ſteady, and his favour which gives us comfort. When he hides his face, we ſhall be troubled; when he withdraws his hand, our mountain will totter.

We ſhould live above the world—above the creature; for the unſtable world—the changing creature, cannot give us permanent happineſs.

True chriſtians are deſcribed, in the revelation, as clothed with the ſun, crowned with ſtars, and having the moon under their feet. The moon, which is an attendant on this earth, and is ſubject to obſervable changes, is emblematical of the mutability of earthly things. The chriſtian, whoſe

head is among the ſtars, whoſe faith and affections are in heaven, deſpiſes the intereſts and glories of the world; for theſe, like the moon, are always changing.

5. If the faſhion of the world is paſſing away, let us, in affliction, weep as if we wept not.

Things may change for the better, as well as for the worſe. As adverſity ſucceeds proſperity, ſo proſperity ſucceeds adverſity. As darkneſs follows the day, ſo light chaſes away the darkneſs. Give thanks, O ye ſaints, at the remembrance of God's holy government; for his anger endures for a moment; but in his favour is life. Weeping may continue for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Severe afflictions ſeldom laſt long. The merciful God will not contend forever, for the ſpirit would fail before him. Though he cauſe grief, yet will he have compaſſion according to the multitude of his tender mercies.

6. The changing nature of things around us, ſhould remind us of our great change. When we ſee the faſhion of the world paſſing away, it becomes us to realiſe that we are paſſing away alſo, and have here no continuing city.

The ſeaman, in a feeble bark, toſſed on the tumultuous ocean, driven by changing winds, riſing and falling with the fluctuating waters, ſurely will not imagine himſelf on firm ground, nor forget his danger of being ſwallowed up in the deep.

We are on a rolling element. Every thing, which we behold, is ſhifting its appearance. Noth-

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ing is permanent. The ſcene is changing every hour. New objects preſent themſelves, and new events take place. Time is on the wing. Each moment is a new portion of time, which never was ours before; and while we ſpeak, it is gone. Every breath imbibes a new portion of air; and when we have expired it, we can collect it no more. Our fellow men are moving off the ſtage; they retire behind the curtain, and never are ſeen again. Like bubbles on the ſtream, they riſe and float; they ſwell and burſt: They riſe no more; but others ſucced in their place. Amidſt theſe changes, ¿ Can we forget, that we are mutable and mortal? Let us live as on the borders of eternity, looking and preparing for that ſolemn moment, which will remove us from this changing ſcene, to a world where all things will be new.

Finally: ——The tranſient nature of worldly things ſhould lead our thoughts to heaven, where none of the painful viciſſitudes of the preſent ſtate will attend us.

Changes there will be in heaven; but not like ſome, which now we ſee. They will be only changes for the better—from glory to glory—from perfection to perfection. There will be no fear of loſing the crown, which we have gained, or of being baniſhed from the bleſt abodes, into which we have entered. He who is holy, will be holy ſtill. He will be made a pillar in the temple of God, and go no more out.

Let all be ſolicitous to become the ſubjects of that moral change, which qualifies for ſo glori-

ous a ſtate. While all things are changing, let us conſider, that one change is needful—a change from ſin to holineſs; from the faſhion of the world to the image of God. Let this be the object of our fervent deſires. This will prepare us for the great change which awaits us; the change from this to another ſtate.

When our ſouls are made partakers of a divine nature, and filled with divine love, all worldly changes will work for our good, and contribute to our growing preparation for the enjoyment of God.

Then ſhall we rejoice in the thought, that though the heavens and the earth are waxing old, and will be changed as a garment, yet God is the ſame forever, and his ſervants will be eſtabliſhed before him.

THE END OF THE FORTIETH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XLI.

The infamous Character of the Churl.

1 SAMUEL, XXV. 2, 3.

There was a man in Maon, whoſe poſſeſſions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thouſand ſheep, and a thouſand goats; and he was ſheering his ſheep in Carmel. And the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife was Abigail. And ſhe was a woman of a good underſtanding, and of a beautiful countenance; but the man was churliſh and evil in his doings.—

THIS Nabal obtained a place in ſacred hiſtory, not by any virtuous or worthy action, but merely by the churliſhneſs of his temper, and the conſequences which it produced. The ſeverity of his manners in domeſtick life might probably have paſſed without this publick notice, had not the ſame ſeverity appeared on a delicate and critical occaſion.

David, with his adherents, driven into the wilderneſs by Saul's perſecution, applied to this opulent farmer, in a time of family feſtivity, to ſend a ſmall refreſhment to him and his people. The ſcurrilous return which he made to David's requeſt, was ſuch as would have touched the feelings of any man, eſpecially ſuch a man as David, naturally quick and ſenſible, and now irritated by an unprovoked perſecution. David took a reſolution, raſh indeed, and unjuſtifiable, but, under his circumſtances, in ſome meaſure excuſable, to extirpate the churl and all that belonged to him.

Abigail his wife, having heard of his rudeneſs, and apprehending the miſchief which was ariſing, interpoſed with ſuch prudence and addreſs, as to prevent the execution.

The ſtory is familiar to you: I ſhall not need to relate it at large. We ſhall naturally advert to the moſt material circumſtances in illuſtrating the character of Nabal.

This man was placed, by providence, in a condition to enjoy as much happineſs as the world can give. David ſalutes him, as *the man who lived in proſperity*. He was diſtinguiſhed from all around him by extenſive poſſeſſions, ſucceſs in buſineſs, the multitude of his flocks, the number of his ſervants, and the grandeur of his entertainments. In addition to all this, he was highly favoured in his domeſtick connexion. The woman, whom he had choſen for his companion in life, was beautiful in her perſon, ſuperior in

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her accompliſhments, ſweet in her temper, ſoft in her manners, and engaging in her addreſs. Such ſhe appears through the whole ſtory.

View the man only thus far, and you will pronounce him one of the happieſt of mortals. In the ſequel, however, you find him quite the reverſe. He ſtands diſtinguiſhed, as much for his infamous life and miſerable death, as for his worldly greatneſs and proſperity. If you aſk, ¿ What could make ſo proſperous a man unhappy ? The hiſtorian tells you, *The man was churliſh and evil in his doings.*

The character of the *churl*, here aſcribed to Nabal, is drawn at large, by the prophet Iſaiah, chap. xxxii. 5—"The vile perſon ſhall no more be called liberal, nor the churl ſaid to be bountiful; for the vile perſon will ſpeak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practiſe hypocriſy, and utter error againſt the Lord, to make empty the ſoul of the hungry, and he will cauſe the drink of the thirſty to fail. The inſtruments alſo of the churl are evil. He deviſeth wicked devices to deſtroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy ſpeaketh right: But the liberal deviſeth liberal things, and by liberal things ſhall he ſtand."

1. The repulſe, which Nabal gave to David's meſſengers, ſhews him to have been of a *contracted, illiberal* mind.

If the happineſs of man conſiſted in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſes, Nabal had been happy. But, quite the reverſe, an abund-

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ance, without diſcretion to uſe it, capacity to enjoy it, and benevolence to apply it, tends only to miſery. To a narrow and covetous ſoul, it is a ſource of jealouſy, anxiety and fear.

Mankind are placed in a mutual connexion with, and dependence on, one another, that there might be occaſion and opportunity for the mutual exerciſe of kindneſs and beneficence. To do good and communicate, to relieve impotent diſtreſs, to cheer the deſponding heart, to reſcue the ſons of virtue from the temptations of want, and ſpread peace and contentment among the poor and afflicted, is one of the higheſt pleaſures of a generous mind. Riches in the hands of one who poſſeſſes ſuch a ſoul, are a bleſſing to himſelf and to thoſe around him. While they enable him to increaſe the happineſs of others, they make an addition to his own. He remembers the words of our Lord, recorded by Saint Luke, *It is more bleſſed to give, than to receive.* Job, in the day of his adverſity, reflected with heartfelt ſatisfaction, that he had delivered the poor who cried, and the needy who had none to help them; that he had cauſed the widow's heart to ſing for joy, and the bleſſing of thoſe, who were ready to periſh, had come upon him.

The churl, incapable of doing good, is more miſerable in proportion to his abundance. His only enjoyment is mere animal gratification; and this is often accompanied with regret. He is vexed with perpetual ſuſpicions of the envy and ill intentions of his neighbours. If he gives, it is with

reluctance.

reluctance. His alms are extorted, rather than beſtowed. He reflects upon them with pain. He upbraids thoſe who have received them. He accuſes himſelf with folly and imprudence, and reſolves to guard in future againſt ſuch waſte and miſapplication. The action which, in good men, would be a virtue, becomes a vice in him, by the evil paſſions which it awakens; and that which would gratify their benevolent feelings, is a torment to him, by croſſing the intentions of his illiberal heart.

2. *Ingratitude* was conſpicuous in the character of Nabal. *He rendered evil for good.*

David politely ſuggeſts the good offices which his people had done for Nabal, while his flocks were abroad in the fields. Nabal's ſhepherds confeſs the juſtice of the repreſentation.—"The men," ſay they, "were very good to us; we were not hurt, neither lacked we any thing, as long as we were converſant with them in the fields; but they were a wall to us by night and by day."

The ſmalleſt ſenſe of obligation would have prompted a voluntary acknowledgment, to thoſe who had yielded him ſuch friendly protection; at a time too, when their neceſſities were urgent, and they had power to have taken, with impunity, whatever their occaſion required. But inſtead of this, to reject their decent application, and revile them as a gang of runaway ſervants, was a ſtriking proof of a baſe and ungrateful heart.

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The happineſs of mankind much depends on reciprocal courteſies. It is often in our power to render eſſential ſervices to our neighbours, without ſenſible inconvenience to ourſelves. A liberal mind rejoices in ſuch opportunities. ¿ Who of us, on recollection, will not find, that he has frequently received unſolicited benefits from thoſe around him? We eaſily feel and remember an injury: But the kindneſſes done us are more numerous than the injuries. Men ſeldom offer a direct, intentional wrong, unleſs they are preſſed with great temptations, or, impelled by accidental paſſions; and theſe uſually are tranſient. But there are a thouſand little offices of goodneſs, which they voluntarily perform becauſe they come naturally in their way, and fall in with the common feelings of humanity. It would tend much to cement friendſhip, unite neighbourhood, and preſerve the peace of ſociety, if inſtead of ſeriouſly noticing every trivial and caſual wrong, we ſhould remark, acknowledge, and requite the good turns which are done us. The man who finds, that his goodneſs is well accepted, feels himſelf repaid, and is encouraged to repeat it. But indifference and inattention in thoſe whom he has ſtudied to oblige, mortifies his feelings, and damps the ardor of his benevolence.

Beſure, if a ſubſtantial kindneſs is done us, in the time of our calamity, to neglect the benefactor, in the day of our proſperity and his misfortune, is a degree of ingratitude not eaſy to be borne.

borne. Indifference, in such a case, wounds more deeply, than a positive injury in another: A positive injury, in this case, will wound more deeply still. Nabal's ingratitude was provoking; the scurrility added to it was intolerable.

It was a noble spirit of gratitude, as well as piety, which the patriarch Joseph expressed, when being solicited by his master's wife to an act of lewdness, he replied, "Behold my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand, neither hath he kept back any thing from me, but thee, because thou art his wife. ¿ How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It is remarked much to the dishonor of one of Pharaoh's officers, to whom Joseph had shewed kindness, when they were fellow prisoners, "that in the days of his prosperity, he remembered not Joseph, but forgat him."

Gratitude feels a kindness, retains a sense of it, delights to acknowledge and requite it. The pleasure which it has felt in kindnesses received, prompts it to communicate like pleasure to others. The same habitual disposition which excites returns of favour to a benefactor, operates in a way of liberality to the indigent. He who experiences the satisfaction of receiving a seasonable benefit, without a heart to give to others, in similar want, the same satisfaction, is a stranger to the power of gratitude.

3. Nabal was a man of *brutal manners*, and *ungoverned passion*.

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The anſwer which he returned to David's polite requeſt, diſcovered the ſavage more than the man. "¿ Who is David? ¿ Who is the ſon of Jeſſe? There be many ſervants, now adays, that break away, every man from his maſter. ¿ Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and the fleſh which I have killed for my ſheerers, and give them to men, whom I know not, whence they be?" Whatever allowance may be made for a harſh expreſſion under a ſudden provocation, ſuch cool, unprovoked ſcurrility, ſuch railing in return for civility, indicates a heart thoroughly vitiated and depraved.

Religion requires, that our ſpeech be always with grace, ſeaſoned with ſalt, that we be gentle to all men, courteous, and eaſy to be entreated.

Many of the contentions, which happen between neighbours and friends, ariſe from the ungoverned petulance of the tongue. Men, ſubject to guſts of paſſion and raſhneſs of ſpeech, often create to themſelves enemies, and diſoblige and alienate their friends. But with a man, whoſe temper and language are generally lawleſs and ungoverned, no friendſhip can be formed; no ſociety can be maintained. "Make no friendſhip," ſays Solomon, "with an angry man; and with a furious man thou ſhalt not go, leſt thou learn his ways, and get a ſnare to thy ſoul." It is not an eaſy matter to preſerve our temper, while we converſe with one who has no command of his own. The ſparks of his fire, will eaſily kindle in us, for we all have combuſtible

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materials about us. If we have treated him with friendſhip, his ill nature is the more provoking. Solomon therefore adviſes, that we form no unneceſſary connexion with men of lawleſs paſſions and inſolent manners, leſt we loſe the command of our own tempers, and be hurried into a dangerous contention.

To call others by opprobrious names, expoſes us to the judgment of God. Revilers are ranked among the odious characters, which are excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Chriſtianity forbids us to render railing for railing; much more to begin the railing. On the contrary, it teaches us, that being reviled, we ſhould bleſs; being defamed, we ſhould entreat. In the preſent weakneſs of human nature, ſuch a command of ourſelves will often be found difficult. Leſt, therefore, we incautiouſly fall into exceſs, the apoſtle directs, that if any man, who is called a brother, be a reviler, we keep no company with him.

4. This Nabal appears to have been peculiarly *factious and troubleſome, in his own family.*

His ſervants, too well acquainted with his temper and manners, characterize him, as ſuch a ſon of Belial, that a man cannot ſpeak to him. His wife, when ſhe ſaw danger ariſing againſt the family, ventured not to ſpeak with him on the ſubject.

The happineſs of domeſtick life conſiſts moſt eſſentially in peace and harmony. The peace of a family depends on nothing ſo much as on the ſoft and eaſy manners, the courteous and oblig-

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ing language, the ſmooth and placid tempers of the heads toward each other, and toward the inferior members. Government in a houſehold is much better ſupported by goodneſs, than by rigor. There is a low, groveling familiarity, which renders a man contemptible. But to avoid this, he need not be a tyrant. Wanton ſeverity is inconſiſtent with domeſtick authority. This may produce a fear and dread, which will operate occaſionally: Goodneſs only will inſpire with that calm reverence and ſteady affection, which are the true principles of obedience.

The man, who can never give an anſwer mildly, nor grant a requeſt cheerfully—who can never paſs over the ſmalleſt fault without menaces, nor reward a virtuous action with his ſmiles—who can never ſpeak, but with ſtern and forbidding airs; nor reprove and adviſe, but with rough and boiſterous paſſion—who never can enter into eaſy converſation with his companion, nor invite his children to the entertainment of inſtructive or amuſing diſcourſe—who can ſhew no tokens of approbation, when they have endeavoured to pleaſe him, nor reſtrain the ſtorm of paſſion, if a croſs accident happens—ſuch a man, however he may be feared, cannot be reverenced. Though he may be dreaded, he cannot be loved. The external homage paid him, is attended with inward contempt. The obedience which he receives is extorted; not given. It is like the worſhip which certain heathens are ſaid to pay to the devil;

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not in hope that he will do them good, but from fear that he will do them mischief.

This man can enjoy none of the pleasure of domestick friendship, the pleasure of mingling souls, exchanging sentiments, and communicating the feelings of the heart. His state is a kind of solitude; he has free intercourse with none; and they, who are compelled to be near him, think their state worse than solitude, because they are in perpetual fear. Abigail, in her important adventure to pacify David's exasperated spirits, conferred with her servants, rather than with her husband. From his advice she could expect no aid; and it was dangerous to speak to him.

5. A habit which added much to the infamy of his character, and probably aggravated the ruggedness of his temper and manners, was *intemperance.*

At the time, when his wife was interposing to divert the storm, which his rudeness had raised against his family, the brute himself was drunk. "He held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and his heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken." The manner in which he flew on David's messengers, gives reason to suspect, that his spirits had already been heated.

A temper naturally mild may be spoiled by excess. But when the natural passions are hasty and violent, intemperance seldom fails to urge them into a tempest. To govern the passions and rule the tongue is, in most men, a work of vigilance. But men of quick and sudden tem-

pers have need to be peculiarly on their guard. It is, of all men, the moſt dangerous for *them* to indulge the appetite. Indulgence inflames their ſpirits, and diveſts them of the power of ſelf command. When they have given the paſſions ſupreme dominion, there is no extravagance from which they are ſecure, and no miſchief to which they are not expoſed. Nabal inflamed with wine, by a raſh and paſſionate ſpeech, involved himſelf and his family in a danger, which would have iſſued fatally, had not the prudence of his wife diverted it. ¿ "Who hath woe?" ſays Soloman, ¿ "Who hath ſorrow?" ¿ Who hath contentions? ¿ Who hath babblings? ¿ Who hath wounds without cauſe? ¿ Who hath redneſs of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to ſeek mixed wine. Look not on the wine, when it is red—at the laſt, it biteth like a ſerpent, and ſtingeth like an adder. Thine heart ſhall utter perverſe things: Yea, thou ſhall be as he that lieth down in the midſt of the ſea, or as he that lieth on the top of a maſt."—Once more;

This Nabal was as infamous for his *puſillanimity* as for the violence of his paſſions and the rudeneſs of his manners.

When Abigail related to him David's high reſentment and bloody reſolution, and the manner in which ſhe had prevented the approaching evil, "his heart died within him and became as a ſtone." Such a fatal ſhock did the ſtory give him, that he ſurvived it only ten days. Though he could rail on David at a diſtance, in haughty and

and bluſtering language, yet he had not fortitude to meet a danger when it was coming, nor even to bear the recital of it after it was paſt. His ſoul, enfeebled by paſſion and intemperance, immediately ſunk under the thought of calamity. A firmneſs to meet danger and bear adverſity, is ſeldom found in thoſe, who give indulgence to appetite and paſſion. "This takes away the heart."

If we would be prepared for the viciſſitudes of an inconſtant world, we muſt habituate ourſelves to ſobriety and ſelfgovernment. If we would enjoy the bleſſings of friendſhip, and the comforts of our worldly poſſeſſions, we muſt reſtrain our appetites, rectify our tempers and rule our tongues. The greateſt affluence can never make a man happy, without a virtuous mind and prudent manners.

Nabal was bleſſed with a plentiful fortune, and an amiable companion. But what could theſe deſirable circumſtances avail the churliſh wretch, who was void of the feelings of benevolence, and a ſtranger to the ſentiments of gratitude—who knew not when to do a favor, nor how to acknowledge a courteſy—whoſe rough paſſions and rude language alienated his friends, and made ſtrangers his enemies—whoſe wanton government excited the contempt of his ſervants—whoſe unſocial manners extinguiſhed the affections of his wife—whoſe exceſſive indulgence obliterated the feeble traces of reaſon, which paſ-

ſion had left, and who, at laſt, died from a mere depreſſion of ſpirit, at the thought of a danger, in which his own mad conduct had involved him?

Such a character, in the greateſt affluence, appears contemptible in every eye.

Let us not be ſolicitous for worldly wealth: Our only ſolicitude ſhould be to approve ourſelves to God by rectitude of heart, and piety of life. Riches can make no man happy without virtue. The virtuous man may be happy without riches. Worldly wealth is a curſe when it falls to the ſhare of one, who knows neither how to uſe it, nor how to enjoy it.

Had Nabal lived in poverty, inſtead of plenty, he might have acted more diſcreetly, and died leſs infamouſly. The natural haughtineſs of his temper was probably increaſed by the idea of his worldly importance; and his affluent ſubſtance afforded him the means of deſtroying himſelf by intemperance.

Providence gives us ſome inſtances of men ruined and undone by their affluence, to teach us that it is neither to be envied in others, nor coveted for ourſelves. We ſometimes ſee thoſe, who, having acted with propriety, and acquitted themſelves with reputation, in the lower grades of life, grow haughty, inſolent and vain, on a ſudden elevation. Let us then have our converſation without covetouſneſs, and be content with ſuch things as we have.

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That we may enjoy ourſelves, let us rule our ſpirits. He who is a ſlave to his own paſſions, is ſubject to perpetual torment within, and expoſed to a thouſand vexations from without.

That we may enjoy the world, let us uſe it with ſobriety; for all exceſs is as inconſiſtent with enjoyment, as it is with virtue. That we may prevent injuries, let us do none ourſelves; for ¿ Who will harm us, if we are followers of that which is good? If we would have friends we muſt ſhew ourſelves friendly. Friendſhip is a delicate flower; it may be blaſted by the frequent winds of paſſion, or be nipped by the froſt of indifference.

If we wiſh for reſpect from our children and domeſticks let us rule them by the laws of kindneſs and love, forbearing menaces and not provoking them to anger, leſt they be diſcouraged. A paſſionate government brings contempt; wanton ſeverity excites rebellion.

If we would know the ſteady pleaſures of domeſtick union, let us be pitiful and courteous, kind in our language, and obliging in our manners. Smooth language prevents, and ſoft anſwers turn away wrath. Love is the happineſs of domeſtick connexions. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a ſtalled ox and hatred therewith.

THE END OF THE FORTYFIRST SERMON.

SERMON XLII.

The different effects of a similar Education illustrated in Herod and Manaen.

ACTS xiii, 1.

Now there were, in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.

WE here see two men educated in the same family, and probably in much the same manner, and yet pursuing a very different course of life.—"Manaen was brought up with Herod the tetrarch."

It would be natural to expect, that children, who grew up together under similar examples and instructions, should appear in the same moral

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and religious character, when they came forward into publick life. But in the inſtance before us, the event was otherwiſe. We find one among the miniſters, and the other among the perſecutors of the church of Chriſt.

The whole family of the Herods are ſtigmatiſed in hiſtory for their luſt and ambition, and eſpecially for their cruelty. Herod the great ſlew the infants in Bethlehem; his ſon impriſoned and murdered John the Baptiſt; and his grandſon killed James the apoſtle.

Manaen is no where mentioned in the ſacred hiſtory, but in this place. All that we read of him is, that he was brought up with Herod, as a brother, but was afterward among the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, and was one of thoſe who miniſtered to the Lord, and who, by the direction of the Holy Ghoſt, ſeparated Barnabas and Paul to the work of preaching the goſpel among the Gentiles. His name, as well as the place of his early education, ſhews that he was a Jew by deſcent.

The church in Antioch was one of the moſt famous chriſtian churches. It was here that the diſciples of Chriſt firſt aſſumed the name of chriſtians. From Manaen's being found miniſtering to the Lord among the prophets in this church, we may conclude, that he early profeſſed his belief of the goſpel. And the ſuperior learning which he had acquired in his education with a young prince, together with his diſtinguiſhed piety, zeal and fortitude, recommended him to the apoſtles

as a man well qualified to take part with them in their miniſtry. He was certainly a man eminent for his faith and virtue, as well as for his learning and abilities; elſe he would not ſo ſoon have been admitted to a place among the prophets and teachers in this celebrated church.

The character of Herod was juſt the reverſe of Manaen's. He was vicious and debauched in his private life, haughty, cruel and tyrannical in his government and a murderer of Chriſt's forerunner.

So diverſe were the characters of theſe two men, who were brought up together under ſimilar inſtructions and examples.

What kind of education they had in their youth, we may form ſome probable conjecture from Herod's high deſcent. He was of princely blood, and, doubtleſs, had a princely education: And as he was probably to be a chief ruler in Judea, we muſt ſuppoſe, that he was inſtructed in the Jewiſh religion: For this was juſtly eſteemed a neceſſary branch of education in one, who was to preſide over that people. Paul ſays to Herod Agrippa, "I know thee to be expert in all cuſtoms and queſtions, which are among the Jews;" and he appeals to him, as one, who, "believed the prophets." Thus Agrippa was educated; and probably his predeceſſors were educated in the ſame manner.

As Manaen was brought up with Herod, we may conclude, that he alſo, as well as Herod, was carefully inſtructed in the writings of Moſes

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and the prophets, and in the rites and forms of the Jewiſh religion, with thoſe other branches of learning, which are judged neceſſary to qualify men for high and important ſtations.

But amidſt theſe ſuperior advantages, there were undoubtedly many dangerous temptations. The pomp and pleaſure of princely courts, and the corrupt examples that are often ſeen there, are by no means favourable to youthful piety. Herod made no virtuous improvement of the advantages which attended his early life. On the contrary, he was led away by the corrupt manners of an impious court. Manaen, in the ſame ſituation, early became religious, eſcaped the corruptions of the world, and made ſuch advancement in knowledge and piety, that we find him ranked among ſome of the firſt preachers of the goſpel.

We here ſee, that youths, brought up in the ſame family, and in the ſame manner, may take to every different courſes, and make a very different end.

Men's lives are not always anſwerable to the advantages which they enjoy. "Many are called but few are choſen." That ſame goſpel, which is a ſavour of life unto life to ſome, is to others a ſavour of death unto death. The preaching of the croſs of Chriſt, which was to ſome a rock of ſalvation, was to others a ſtone of ſtumbling. Theſe obſervations of ſcripture we ſee verified in fact. Among the multitudes, which enjoy the ſame goſpel; yea, and who profeſs to believe it too,

too, there are different characters. While ſome, by a patient continuance in welldoing, ſeek for glory, there are others who obey not the truth, but hold it in unrighteouſneſs.

Nor is this diverſity of character to be ſeen only in larger ſocieties; it may be found in particular families.

Education doubtleſs has great influence in forming the temper and manners. It is reaſonable to expect, that men will ordinarily be virtuous or vicious, according to the turn which is given to their minds in the diſcipline of youth. If you train up a child in the way in which he ſhould go, you may hope, that, when he is old, he will not depart from it; but if you leave him to himſelf, to the impulſe of his own giddy inclinations, and to the corrupt influence of vicious examples; and beſure, if to them you add your own corrupt example and counſel, you may reaſonably expect, he will bring his friends to ſhame, and himſelf to ruin.

There are, however, exceptions from this obſervation. There are ſome who under great diſadvantages early enter upon a virtuous courſe, and ſteadily purſue it through life; and there are thoſe, who, in contempt of the beſt inſtructions and examples, make themſelves vile and will not be reſtrained. In the family of David, who reſolved to walk within his houſe in a perfect way, there was rebellious Abſalom. In the houſe of Jeroboam, who made Iſrael to ſin, there was godly Abijah.

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In ſome families we ſee the children generally of a ſober and virtuous turn; and in other families we ſee them the reverſe. When the children are generally vicious, we ſuſpect there is ſome groſs neglect in thoſe who have had the care of them; or if they are of a contrary character, we conclude much pains have been taken in their religious education. And though, for the moſt part, this concluſion will be found juſt, yet it is not always ſo. For we ſee this difference of character take place among children of the ſame family, who have had the ſame inſtructions and examples.

It will naturally be enquired, ¿ Whence proceeds this difference?

1. There is undoubtedly a very great diverſity in natural temper.

Though all are partakers of the corruption conſequent on the primitive apoſtaſy, yet this corruption does not always appear and operate in juſt the ſame way. Though in all there is an inclination to evil, yet the inclination is not in all to the ſame evil, or in the ſame degree. This diverſity calls for different treatment. The ſame kind of government, which would be uſeful to one, may be dangerous to another. Thoſe reſtraints, which would be ſufficient for this youth, may be unfelt and diſregarded by that; and the curb, which would only hold the latter, might break and deſtroy the tender ſpirit of the former.

It is the wiſdom of parents to watch and obſerve the various paſſions, tempers and propenſi-

ties

ties of their children, and diverſify their government accordingly.——And then,

2. Children early have different worldly proſpects, which often make a great difference in their character and conduct.

This was remarkably the caſe of the two young men mentioned in our text. Though Herod and Manaen were educated together, yet they had not the ſame proſpect in life. Herod, who was of royal deſcent, had early expectations of being exalted to a throne. This grand object probably engroſſed his thoughts; and to this all his ambition, and all his ſtudies were directed. The other had no ſuch object before him. He was born to a humbler lot. His mind was more at liberty to admit the ſober concerns of religion. Worldly greatneſs is not uſually the moſt favourable to piety. The apoſtle ſays, "Not many wiſe men after the fleſh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." He who would receive the kingdom of God, muſt humble himſelf as a little child. Such a difference of proſpects, as there was between theſe two perſons, cannot ordinarily take place. But there may be a difference in a leſs degree, among brethren in every family.

Different paſſions, and capacities put young men on different purſuits. Some, through a natural indolence or ſelf diffidence, fall ſo low in their views and deſigns, that they never reach to eminence in any profeſſion; nor attain to that degree of uſefulneſs and reſpectability of which they ſeem naturally capable. Others take their aim ſo high,

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that they never can rise to the object by any virtuous exertions. Hence by their aspiring ambition they are urged to an indirect and winding path, that they may climb the steep ascent, where the cautious foot of virtue will not dare to tread. "They who will be rich," says the apostle, "fall into temptation, and a snare, and many foolish lusts which drown men in final perdition." Happy is the youth, who sets out in life, with a governing aim to approve himself to God, and secure the joys of immortality; and to this aim subordinates all his temporal views.

3. The sovereign grace of God must also be acknowledged in the difference which we often observe among the members of the same family.

The dependence of mankind in their fallen state, on the influence of the divine Spirit, must be acknowledged by all who believe revelation. God affords this kindly influence to all under the gospel, especially in the early period of life. There is a day, when the Spirit of grace strives with them, and the things of their peace may be known. Happy are they, who early attend to these things, and who obey the heavenly voice while it is called to day. As this grace is undeserved, so it may be afforded to different persons in various degrees, and for a different length of time. No man can demand it as his native right, and therefore none can complain, though it is afforded to others in a greater measure than to himself. Besides, ¿ Where is the youth who can say, He has never grieved the spirit of

grace—

grace—never reſiſted its holy motions—never received its influence in vain ¿If among thoſe, who have alike forfeited the grace of God, it is withdrawn from ſome, and renewed to others, ¿Where is the injuſtice? ¿Shall the eye of man be evil, becauſe God is good? ¿May not God have mercy on whom he will have mercy, when he owes his mercy to none?

Farther——Though men may be born and educated under the ſame external advantages, yet doubtleſs ſome do more than others to oppoſe the grace, and quench the ſpirit of God. And perhaps many, who appear to us to poſſeſs the happieſt natural temper, and to conduct among mankind with the moſt agreeable manners, may have indulged thoſe impious thoughts and paſſions toward God, which others never dared to retain; and, by their ſecret wickedneſs, have done more to provoke God, and grieve his holy ſpirit, than ſome who appear far more criminal in the undiſcerning eye of man. Though the grace of God is ſovereign, it is not arbitrary. It makes a difference among men in the beſtowment of outward advantages and inward aſſiſtances; but divine wiſdom always ſees a reaſon for this difference, though human ignorance diſcerns none.

This ſubject will afford ſeveral uſeful reflections.

1. We ſee the particular care, which was taken in the apoſtolick times, that publick teachers ſhould be men of diſtinguiſhed learning and ability, as well as exemplary virtue and piety.

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Moſt of Chriſt's firſt diſciples were, indeed, men who had received, in their youth, but a common education. But before they were ſent forth to preach, they were taken under the immediate diſcipline and inſtruction of Jeſus himſelf; and were, for ſeveral years, trained up for the miniſtry under his care. Paul enjoyed not this privilege; but he had other literary advantages; he was a man of the firſt education in his day, being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel.

When the diſciples, after their maſter's aſcenſion, ſent forth teachers into the churches which they had planted, they ever gave a preference to men of learning. Manaen was one who had been favoured with a princely education. Timothy from a child had known the holy ſcriptures. Apollos was a man, mighty in the ſcriptures. Luke, Stephen, and others, appear to have been men of ſuperiour literary accompliſhments. And, as the apoſtles always conſidered learning to be a deſirable qualification in thoſe whom they recommended to the miniſtry, ſo they alſo cautioned the miniſters whom they ordained, not to lay hands ſuddenly on any man, and particularly on novices, who had not had time to furniſh their minds with competent knowledge to become teachers of others.

2. We ſee that parents ought to pay a particular attention to the different tempers and diſpoſitions of their children, and diverſify their government accordingly.

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As there is a variety in the natural and conſtitutional bias of the human mind, ſo the ſame manner of government, which would be proper for one, might be very unſuitable for another. Some muſt be ruled with greater rigor, others with more lenity—Some kept under a ſeverer curb, others treated with more tenderneſs and indulgence. The parent ought to watch the early inclinations of his children, that he may correct their evil propenſities, before they are grown into incurable habits; and may encourage and confirm every hopeful diſpoſition, leſt it be overborne by the power of temptation. Family government is a work which requires much care and prudence, that it may be adapted to the tempers and circumſtances, infirmities and dangers of thoſe who are the ſubjects of it; and diverſified according to their reſpective caſes.

3. The young may here ſee, that no worldly connexions, no outward temptations, no incitements or examples, will excuſe them in the neglect of religion.

Herod the tetrarch was a man of a vicious and abandoned character. Though he did ſome commendable actions, he is not applauded for any habitual virtue; nor was there ſcarcely a vice of which he was not capable. Manaen, converſant in a royal court, and connected with ſo vile a companion, received an education, which, however favourable to learning, was exceedingly dangerous to his virtue. And yet we find him ſo diſtinguiſhed for his piety, that he

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is early numbered among the prophets and teachers of the church.

There is such a thing, as a youth's maintaining his virtue, amidst the most powerful temptations. There is such a thing, as being blameless and harmless, and without rebuke, in the midst of the vicious and profane. There is such a thing, as discharging the duties of relation and friendship to bad men, without an imitation of their wicked manners. You are not to seek connexions with the ungodly; you are not to chuse them for your stated companions. There is always danger in associating with the vicious: And you are not unnecessarily to throw yourselves into the jaws of danger. It was David's wisdom, that, when he resolved to keep God's commandments, he said to evildoers, Depart from me. But if providence so orders your situation in life, that you are unavoidably conversant with the wicked, you must guard against the infection of their corrupt advice and example. If you must have fellowship with them in your civil concerns, yet have no fellowship with their unfruitful works, but rather reprove them. The man who voluntarily runs into the company of the profane, will easily be seduced by them; for he goes with a heart disposed to conform to their manners; and, by inviting temptations, he forfeits the divine protection. But if providence calls you into the place of temptation, and you take heed to your ways,

while the wicked are before you, the grace of God will be ready to your aſſiſtance.

Let this reſolution be fixed in your minds, that you will walk in the path of virtue; and when you meet with temptations to depart from it, liſten not to them; repel them in their firſt approach; renew your good reſolution; think of the danger of violating it; and apply to God for his preſerving grace. Thus you may keep yourſelves unſpotted from the world, and the wicked one will not touch you.

4. The young are here cautioned, that they abuſe not the grace of God.

You ſee, that perſons in the ſame family, and under the ſame advantages, purſue different courſes, and come to different ends. ¿ If external means alone were ſufficient to religion, why was Herod ſo different from Manaen? The grace of God was undoubtedly to be acknowledged in the preſervation of the latter from the guilty courſe of the former. ¿ But what if Manaen had continually oppoſed every ſerious ſentiment, conviction and reſolution excited in his mind? ¿ What if he had ſtudied to extinguiſh a ſenſe of virtue, by encouraging the principles of infidelity? ¿ What if he had conſtantly ſought to baniſh all rational thoughts and religious purpoſes, by diſſipation and ſenſuality? ¿ Is it probable that we ſhould have found him among the profeſſors and the teachers of religion? Some, indeed, are recovered, late in life, from groſs wickedneſs. But more uſually, they who give themſelves

ſelves up to impiety and irreligion in youth, become ſo hardened in their ſins, and ſo dead to a ſenſe of their danger, that nothing awakens them to repentance.

If you depend on the grace of God, it is of importance that you early attend to its kind motions on your hearts; that you encourage the convictions which it awakens on your conſciences; and that you purſue the virtuous reſolutions which it excites. Never dare to act contrary to the real ſenſe and feeling of your minds—never dare to entertain any corrupt and licentious principles—never dare to make light of things ſerious, and to treat with contempt the ſacred inſtitutions of religion. Carefully avoid whatever tends to ſtupify the conſcience, and to deaden the ſenſibility of the heart. For if you thus oppoſe and abuſe that grace of God, on which you depend, you have reaſon to fear, that you will ſoon be hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin, and will finally periſh in your guilt and impenitence.

5. Let the young be rational and diſcreet in forming their worldly proſpects.

Herod's royal birth gave ſcope to his ambition; and the expectation of worldly greatneſs contributed to draw him off from religion, and to plunge him into thoſe vices which terminated in his ruin. If the honors and the riches of the world are ſo dangerous, let none raiſe high proſpects to themſelves. Set out in life with an aim to do good—to ſerve God in works of piety, and to ſerve your generation in the practice of juſtice

and charity. Think of no worldly honor and wealth, but what ſhall riſe on the foundation of virtue and righteouſneſs. You may aim at a degree of reſpectability among men. This is an honeſt and manly aim. But never aim at any kind of worldly greatneſs, but what may be attained in a way of well doing. Virtue is dignity in itſelf. All kinds of worldly dignity, but that which is built on a virtuous character, are but marks of infamy.

Remember, you have a part to act in this world, which bears a relation to the future. Seek firſt the kingdom of God. Seek nothing that is contrary to this. Governed by a ſuperior regard to futurity, you may purſue your worldly intereſts with innocence. While religious principles predominate in your heart, you may proceed ſafely. Your ſecular employments will be ſubſervient to the intereſt of your ſouls; and your religion will alſo contribute to your temporal happineſs.

When you ſee the young, who enjoy the means of religion, and the advantages of a good education, running headlong into the path of vice and ruin, look upon them with compaſſion and fear. Pity them, and tremble for yourſelves.

Let a view of their danger awaken your caution to avoid the ſame. Warn them of the miſery before them. At leaſt, ſhow them, by your example, that you view their track as fatal. Fly from it, and walk in the way everlaſting. "Bleſſed is the man who walketh not in the counſel of the ungodly,

ungodly, nor ſtandeth in the way of ſinners, nor ſitteth in the ſeat of the ſcornful; but who delights in the law of his God, and meditates therein continually."

6. How unhappy will be the caſe of thoſe youths, who have not only enjoyed a good education, but been favored with pious examples among the youths of their connexion, and yet, after all, have purſued the path of vice. This was the caſe of Herod. Manaen was much to be commended, that he had followed religion in oppoſition to the vicious example of Herod, with whom he had been brought up. Herod is worthy of a ſorer condemnation, becauſe he turned away from religion, when he had ſo inviting an example before him in the amiable life and manners of Manaen his foſter brother. The virtue of the one is exalted; the guilt of the other is aggravated, by the contraſt.

Know, my young friend, if ſinners intice you, you are not to conſent. You cannot excuſe yourſelf in a vicious courſe, though you have ever ſo many enticements. How inexcuſable are you then, if you run into this courſe, in oppoſition to the virtuous and pious examples of your friends and companions. You may not follow a multitude to do evil; much leſs may you forſake the virtuous to do evil alone. The true penitent will no longer run, with former guilty companions, into exceſs of riot. ¿ And will you dare to run into exceſs of riot, when you ſee others flying from the fatal track?

You are brought up in a religious family. You have, in common with others, received ſeaſonable inſtructions and warnings. ¿ Do you ſee ſome with whom you are educated, walking in wiſdom's way, devoting themſelves to God, and working out their ſalvation ? And are you careleſs and ſenſual, profane and ungodly ; regardleſs of God's word, and of your own ſalvation ? ¿ What excuſe will be found for you ? Thoſe virtuous youths have been brought up with you ; ¿ And why have you perverted an education, which has been ſo ſalutary to them ? You and they have dwelt together here, and enjoyed ſimilar advantages—you value their company and friendſhip—you eſteem them for their virtuous manners—¿ But will you purſue a courſe ſo diverſe from theirs ? ¿ Muſt there ſoon be an eternal ſeparation between you and them ? While they are riſing to the world of glory, ¿ Will you ruſh headlong down to the regions of darkneſs ?

Let their example rebuke your impiety ; awaken you from your careleſſneſs ; and engage you to mind, in this your day, the things which belong to your peace.

Be a follower of them who through faith and patience inherit the promiſes. Be the companion of them who fear God and keep his commandments. Let their friends, be your friends ; their God, your God ; and whither they go, do you go alſo.

END OF THE FORTYSECOND SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XLIII.

The Dovelike Deſcent of the Spirit on Chriſt.

LUKE iii, 22.

The Holy Ghoſt deſcended, in a bodily ſhape, like a dove upon him.——

THIS viſible deſcent of the Holy Ghoſt on our divine Lord, was at the time of his baptiſm, when he was entering on his publick miniſtry. The prieſts under the law were inaugurated into office by the ceremony of anointing with oil, and waſhing with water. Jeſus, that he might conform to every divine inſtitution, choſe to begin the execution of his ſacred office, by the like ſolemn conſecration. He therefore came to John to be baptiſed of him. Immediately after his baptiſm, while he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghoſt

deſcended on him, and there iſſued from the ſky a voice proclaiming him God's beloved ſon, and commanding the people to hear him.

This was a manifeſt fulfilment of the prophecy of Iſaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, becauſe he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek."—That his baptiſm was his unction to the miniſtry, Peter expreſsly teaches, in the tenth chapter of the Acts.—"The word which God ſent to the children of Iſrael, preaching peace by Jeſus Chriſt, that word ye know, which was publiſhed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptiſm, which John preached; how God anointed Jeſus of Nazareth with the holy Ghoſt and with power."

Jeſus, being the divine mediator, and himſelf without ſin, could not need baptiſm for the purpoſes, for which it is applied to us. The baptiſm which he received muſt, in its deſign, be a very different thing from that, which he afterward inſtituted, as a token of the remiſſion of ſin, and eternal life in a way of faith and repentance. Hence it appears, that all arguments drawn from his baptiſm, to determine the time, or manner in which others ſhould be baptiſed, are wholly impertinent.

After Chriſt's baptiſm, "heaven was opened, and the holy Ghoſt deſcended in a viſible form." The appearance probably was a *bright cloud*, which, under the old teſtament, was the ordinary ſymbol of God's preſence. When the voice here mentioned, was uttered again at the transfigura-

tion

tion on the mount, it proceeded from a *bright cloud*, which overſhadowed him and his attending diſciples. This cloud is called by Saint Peter, *the excellent glory*. When the holy Ghoſt fell on the diſciples at the time of pentecoſt, there was the appearance of *fire*. Chriſt is ſaid to baptiſe with *the holy Ghoſt and with fire*. In alluſion to theſe repreſentations, men's oppoſition to the Spirit of grace, is called *quenching* the Spirit. The evangeliſt ſays, "The holy Ghoſt deſcended, *in a bodily ſhape as a dove*." It is not neceſſary to ſuppoſe, that here was the *ſhape* or *figure* of a dove; nor indeed will the ſyntax of the greek words well admit this ſenſe. The reſemblance was rather in the *manner of deſcent*. The bright cloud, the excellent glory, deſcended, as a dove deſcends, gently hovering around, and ſettling upon the head of Jeſus.

By this ſymbol, and the voice attending it, he was manifeſtly declared to be *the Son of God*. Accordingly John ſays, "I have ſeen the Spirit deſcending from heaven as a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not; *i. e.* until this time, I had not ſo full and certain a knowledge of him: "But he that ſent me to baptiſe with water, the ſame had ſaid to me, upon whom thou ſhalt ſee the Spirit deſcending and remaining, the ſame is he who baptiſeth with the holy Ghoſt. And I ſaw and bare record, that this is the Son of God."

The deſcent of the Spirit on Chriſt *as a dove*, is a circumſtance taken notice of by all the evangeliſts; and it deſerves our particular attention.

This

This might be intended to point out Jeſus, as the meſſenger of peace, to a guilty world.

Noah, in the time of the deluge, ſent forth a dove out of the ark, to diſcover whether the waters were abated. In the evening ſhe returned to him, with an olive leaf in her mouth. By this he knew, that the face of the earth began to be uncovered. This was to the patriarch welcome intelligence. More glorious news does Chriſt bring to our guilty race.

When Jeſus preached in the ſynagogue of Nazareth, he applied to himſelf the words of the prophet—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, becauſe he hath anointed me to preach the goſpel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to publiſh deliverance to the captives, and recovering of ſight to the blind, to ſet at liberty them that are bruiſed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." He ſaid to his hearers, "This ſcripture is, today, fulfilled in your ears."—"And all bare him witneſs, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

The dovelike deſcent of the Spirit on Jeſus, indicated him to the aſſembled multitude, as a pattern of meekneſs, innocence and love, of which virtues the dove is an emblem. And his ſubſequent manners correſponded with the emblem. He was harmleſs and inoffenſive in all his behaviour. Under injuries he was mild and gentle. In his publick office he was tender and affectionate. He laboured to convince and reclaim

claim ſinners by the ſoft and winning arguments of goodneſs and compaſſion, rather than to terrify and amaze them by the awful diſplays of wrath and power. Thus was fulfilled in him the prediction of the prophet—"Behold my ſervant, whom I uphold; my beloved, in whom my ſoul delighteth. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he ſhall ſhew judgment to the Gentiles. He ſhall not ſtrive nor cry, nor ſhall any man hear his voice in the ſtreet; a bruiſed reed ſhall he not break, nor quench the ſmoking flax, until he bring forth judgment unto victory."

This deſcent of the Spirit in the manner of a dove, may alſo be deſigned to ſignify to us the true genius of Chriſt's goſpel, and the diſtinguiſhing character of his diſciples.

Hence then we may obſerve that *the religion of Jeſus conſiſts in a dovelike temper.* This obſervation we will endeavour to illuſtrate.

That we may proceed with ſafety we will give no indulgence to imagination, but will ſtrictly follow the alluſions which we find in ſcripture.

1. The dove is an emblem of purity.

In the law of Moſes this was reckoned a clean bird; and it was ſelected for an offering in the ceremony of purification. The dovelike deſcent of the Spirit on Chriſt reminds us, that, by his goſpel we are called, not to uncleanneſs, but to ſanctification. His *precepts* require the ſtricteſt purity of thought and intention. His *doctrines*, in their proper influence, raiſe our views above earthly intereſts, and direct them to things which

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are in heaven. His *example* teaches us to be holy, undefiled and separate from sinners. His Spirit in its operations and fruits, corresponds with his examples, doctrines and precepts. If then we profess to be christians, we acknowledge our obligation to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and piously in the world, looking unto Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from iniquity, and purify us to himself, a people zealous of good works.

2. Christ directs his disciples to be *harmless* as doves.

Of this dovelike temper he was himself an amiable pattern. The same meek and inoffensive spirit which was in him, must also be in us. We are to give no offence, but to please all men in all things, seeking the profit of many, that they may be saved. We are to condescend to men of low estate; to bear the infirmities of the weak; in matters of indifference to comply with the opinions of our brethren, and in matters of doubt to receive them without uncharitable disputation, always allowing them the liberty which we claim for ourselves, to follow the dictates of conscience. We are to be pitiful in our feelings, courteous in our language and gentle in our manners. We are to be peaceable when differences happen to arise, candid in our construction of men's doubtful actions, and ready to forgive when we meet with injuries. We are to be quiet and do our own business, to be tender

der of the reputation of our neighbours, to ſpeak evil of no man, to render unto all the honour and reſpect which belong to them, and treat them according to their condition and character in life. In a word, we are to follow Chriſt's ſteps, who was holy and harmleſs, who did no ſin, neither was guile found in his mouth.

3. The dove, in the book of Canticles, is an emblem of *cheerfulneſs* and *joy*.

"Lo, the winter is paſt and gone, the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the ſinging of birds is come; the voice of the *turtle* is heard in our land."

The dovelike temper of the goſpel is ſweet, ſerene and pleaſant. Joy is one of the fruits of the ſpirit: It is one of the characters of Chriſt's religion: It is the temper with which we acceptably ſerve him. "The kingdom of God is righteouſneſs and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghoſt; and he that in theſe things ſerveth Chriſt, is accepted of God, and approved of men." True chriſtians have joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope through the power of the holy Ghoſt.

With joy they contemplate the glorious diſcoveries of the goſpel; the wonderful mercy of God to a guilty world; the aſtoniſhing interpoſition of a divine Saviour for the redemption of our periſhing race; and the free and gracious offers of ſalvation to the chief of ſinners.

The precepts of Chriſt's religion they approve and chooſe, as divinely excellent, ſuited to guide

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their actions, refine their tempers, and prepare their hearts for heavenly pleasures.

They rejoice in that holy and benevolent government, which God exercises in the world; and in the liberty which he indulges them, to repair to his throne for the supply of all their wants, and for protection in all their dangers.

When they can appropriate the rich promises of God, and ascertain their interest in them, their religious joy, feeling its present security, and anticipating its approaching felicity, will sometimes swell past utterance, and rise beyond the reach of description. "The trial of your faith," says Saint Peter, "will be found to glory and honor at the appearing of Christ; whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

The religion of Christ, where it has its genuine influence, produces a holy, humble joy in God. It does not make men sour, morose and peevish; but contented, serene and thankful. It disposes them, not to censure, but to justify the ways of God—not to complain of, but to acquiesce in the plan of his government. It does not depress their spirits, and spread a gloom over their faces; but inspires their souls with cheerful and pleasing hopes, which a stranger intermeddles not with. It teaches them to contemplate the wisdom, justice and goodness of God in all his dispensations, and thus gives a relish to prosperity, and consola-

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tion in adverſity. It extends the proſpects beyond this mortal ſtate, and opens to the view more glorious ſcenes of delight above the ſkies, from whence faith and hope look down, with indifference, on the tranſient and unſatisfying objects of the world. It miniſters to the mind matter of meditation and employment, ſweetly adapted to its renewed and ſpiritual taſte; and thus ſecures it from that reſtleſs anxiety, which vexes and torments earthly ſouls.

It is not, then, the ſour and complaining, the gloomy and fretful, but it is the cheerful and contented, the ſerene and thankful chriſtian, who diſcovers the genuine ſpirit, the dovelike temper of Chriſt's religion.

4. Doves are diſtinguiſhed by their mutual *fidelity* and *love*.

To this ſocial and affectionate property there are frequent alluſions in ſcripture. The bridegroom, in the book of Canticles, calls the bride by this, among other endearing names, "*O, my dove*, let me ſee thy face, and hear thy voice, for thy voice is ſweet, and thy face is comely." People in affliction are deſcribed as "mourning like *doves*," who have loſt their companions.

Mutual love is the temper of the goſpel. This is Chriſt's command to his diſciples, "Love one another, as I have loved you." "By this," ſays he, "ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another." Chriſtians are required "to love one another with a pure heart fervently,

fervently, and above all things to have fervent charity among themſelves."

Under the influence of this fervent charity, they will eſteem and regard one another for that ſimilarity of temper and manners, which is common to them all, and which they have all learnt from the ſame goſpel. They will take pleaſure in each other's company, and delight to aſſociate for the joint worſhip of their common Lord. They will maintain a ſtrict fidelity. Having covenanted together for mutual edification and comfort, they will walk in the ſame ſteps, and by the ſame rule. They will not rove and ſcatter abroad; but, like the flock of Chriſt, they will come together in one place, and keep the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace. They will walk in all lowlineſs and meekneſs, bearing offences, forgiving injuries, and returning again to peace if fellowſhip happens to be interrupted. They will take a ſenſible ſhare in each others pleaſures and affections. If one ſuffers, they will ſuffer with him; if one is honoured, all will rejoice. If one wanders away, or ſeems to be loſt, all will mourn his unhappy caſe, and pray for his recovery. They will bewail ſuch as have ſinned and have not repented; and him who repents they will reſtore in the ſpirit of meekneſs, conſidering themſelves, leſt they alſo be tempted.

5. The dove is a *defenceleſs* bird. Hence ſhe is deſcribed as "dwelling in the clefts of the rocks, and in the ſecret places of the ſtairs"; and as "flying to her windows" in times of danger.

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In this view ſhe is an emblem of chriſtian *faith* and *humility*.

True believers, ſenſible of their weakneſs, and of the dangers which attend them, truſt not in themſelves, but in the power and grace of their Saviour. They dare not wander from him, and commit themſelves to the world at large, for they know that birds of prey, the powers of the air, are ſeeking whom they may deſtroy. They keep near to their Divine Protector, dwell in his houſe, and live on the food which is there provided. They venture not to depart from the ſight, or the reach of his windows. When temptations purſue them, hither they fly for ſecurity. To the ſelfrighteous hypocrite, his own goodneſs and ſtrength is a ſtrong city, a high wall in his own conceit. But to humble believers, the name of their Redeemer is a ſtrong tower; into this they run, and are ſafe.

6. The excellent glory, which deſcended like a dove, and reſted on Jeſus, might be intended to repreſent the *beauties* of his church, adorned and dignified by the graces of his ſpirit.

The church of Chriſt is compared to a fair princeſs, all glorious within, and clothed in garments of wrought gold. The dove, which is a beautiful bird, is a natural emblem of the virtues and good works, which diſtinguiſh the chriſtian character. By this alluſion, the Pſalmiſt deſcribes the glorious change made in the people of God, when they were delivered from the bondage and ſuperſtitions of Egypt, and admitted to

enjoy the peculiar privileges of the ſanctuary. "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet ye ſhall be as the wings of a *dove* covered with ſilver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

The reformation of the church, after a time of great declenſion, is expreſſed by her "riſing from the duſt, putting on her beautiful garments, and ſhining forth in the glory of her Lord." The profeſſors of godlineſs are exhorted to adorn themſelves, not with gold, and pearls, and coſtly array, but with good works, and the ornament of a meek and quiet ſpirit; for theſe are of great price in the ſight of God. The righteouſneſs of the ſaints is compared to white raiment. They who watch and keep their garments, will walk with Chriſt in white, for they are worthy.

But leſt I purſue the alluſions too far, I will only obſerve, once more,

7. The dove, which is a fruitful bird, is, by Iſaiah, made an emblem of the *increaſe* of the church in her happy and proſperous periods. Then converts ſhall fly unto God's altar, "as *doves* to their *windows*."

He ſays, "The Redeemer ſhall come to Zion—his Spirit ſhall be upon her, and his words ſhall not depart out of her mouth, nor out of the mouth of her ſeed—and the glory of the Lord ſhall be upon her. The Gentiles ſhall come to her light, and kings to the brightneſs of her riſing. Lift up thine eyes, and ſee; all they gather themſelves together; they come unto thee. Thy ſons ſhall come from far, and thy daughters ſhall be nurſed

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at thy ſide. The abundance of the ſea ſhall be converted to thee, and the forces of the Gentiles ſhall come to thee."

Having mentioned, by name, ſeveral countries, from whence converts ſhall come to glorify God in his houſe, the prophet is ſurpriſed with ſtill new *acceſſions* from unknown, or unexpected parts of the world. "¿ Who are theſe, that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?" A flight of birds reſembles a cloud. The multitudes preſſing from all parts into the kingdom of Chriſt, the prophet compares to a cloud of doves flying into the windows of the dovehouſes. "Who are theſe that fly!" It is an expreſſion of admiration and ſurpriſe at ſuch a ſpeedy increaſe of the church, from perſons, or countries, in which ſuch a change had been little expected. A ſimilar expreſſion we find in the revelation. After an hundred and forty and four thouſand had been ſealed out of all the tribes of Iſrael, John ſays, "He beheld; and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, from all nations and people, ſtood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and cried, Salvation to our God and to the Lamb." And one of the elders ſaid, "¿ What are theſe which are arrayed in white robes? and, ¿ Whence come they? On enquiry, it was found, that "theſe had come out of great tribulation." They had come into the church through great trials and dangers. Such a mighty acceſſion was matter of admiration and joy among angels,

as well as men. If there is joy in heaven, when one ſinner repents, how great will be the joy, when nations are born at once, and the earth brings forth in a day!

The ſocial and benevolent ſpirit of religion in chriſtians, operates in fervent deſires and prayers for the increaſe of Chriſt's flock. They look and long for the time, the ſet time, to favour Zion. They mourn the decay of religion among profeſſors, and the general indifference to it among mankind. They ſpeak often one to another, that they may be fellowhelpers, to the truth. They comfort and encourage thoſe who would join themſelves to the Lord; they take up the ſtumbling blocks out of the way of the lame and feeble. They animate the young and tender, the diffident and fearful. They are careful not to perplex weak and honeſt minds with difficulties and objections, and thus to make the hearts of the righteous ſad, whom God hath not made ſad; but rather to remove dangerous impediments, and confirm good reſolutions. This is the divine inſtruction; "Caſt ye up; go through the gates; prepare the way; gather out the ſtones; ſay to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy ſalvation cometh." Though the glorious things foretold concerning the church, remain to be accompliſhed in ſome future time; yet, if chriſtians would unite in their prayers and labours for her increaſe, ſome part of the promiſed glory might be anticipated in our own times.

THE END OF THE FORTYTHIRD SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XLIV.

The Dovelike Descent of the Spirit on Christ.

LUKE iii. 22.

The holy Ghoſt deſcended, in a bodily ſhape, like a dove upon him.———

FROM this compariſon of the deſcent of the ſpirit on Chriſt, to the gentle hovering of a dove when it alights, we have obſerved, that *the Spirit of Chriſt's religion is a dovelike Spirit.*

This obſervation we have illuſtrated in ſeveral particular inſtances, taken from the alluſions of ſacred ſcripture.

The illuſtration of our ſubject opens to our view ſome important matters, which I ſhall now lay before you, as its proper *improvement.*

1. Our ſubject ſuggeſts to us, that the Spirit of Chriſt uſually comes to the ſoul in a *mild* and

gentle manner. His operations are, as his fruits, dovelike, ſweet and kind.

The benevolent and friendly nature of the diſpenſation which Chriſt was about to introduce, was intimated in the manner of the Spirit's deſcent.

The law, which was a miniſtration of death and condemnation, was delivered to the people with circumſtances of terror and amazement. God came down on the mount with thunder and lightening, with an earthquake and tempeſt; and uttered the law with ſuch an awful voice, that they who heard it, intreated, that it might not be ſpoken any more.

Chriſt came in a different manner to publiſh his goſpel. He appeared, not in the terrors of unveiled divinity, but in the faſhion of a man—not in the forbidding majeſty of a monarch, but in the more familiar form of an ordinary perſon. He taught with ſuch a ſoft and eaſy addreſs, that they who heard him, wondered at the gracious words, which proceeded out of his mouth, and confeſſed, that never man ſpake like him. He dwelt among men full of grace, as well as of truth. If his reproofs were ſometimes pointed with ſeverity, it was only when they met with callous and obdurate hearts.

As his *manner* of teaching, ſo the *doctrines* which he taught, were kind and gracious. While he with plainneſs condemned the ſinner, and warned him of the awful conſequence of his impenitence,

penitence, he proclaimed aloud the mercy of God to pardon the penitent, and, with melting eyes, lamented the dreadful fate of the obſtinate and irreclaimable.

The ordinary influence of his Spirit, in the converſion of ſinners, correſponds with the genius of his goſpel, and the manner of his inſtruction.

The miraculous gifts of the Spirit, on the day of pentecoſt, were diſpenſed in a more grand and ſolemn manner. "When the diſciples were gathered together, ſuddenly there came a ſound from heaven as of a ruſhing mighty wind, and it filled the houſe, where they were: And there appeared cloven tongues, like as of fire, and ſat on each of them; and they were filled with the holy Ghoſt, and ſpake with other tongues." But the ordinary operation of the Spirit in the renovation of ſinners, and the ſanctification of believers, is ſoft and mild—not like a flame of fire, but like a genial warmth—not like a ruſhing wind, but like a gentle breeze. The apoſtle ſays, "God has not given us the ſpirit of bondage, but the ſpirit of adoption—not the ſpirit of fear, but the ſpirit of love and of a ſound mind.

The awakening and convincing power of the Spirit in ſinners is, doubtleſs, often attended with a degree of terror, greater or leſs according to the degree of guilt and enmity previouſly contracted. But this terror, ſo far as it is the effect of goſpel truth, and divine influence, is accompanied with hope, not with deſpair. Sinners

under conviction may, indeed, be so filled with a sense of guilt and danger, as, in a great measure, to overlook the encouragements of the gospel, and consequently to fall into great despondency. But their desponding apprehensions proceed from the weakness of nature, or the power of temptations; not from the direct influence of the Spirit of God.

The gospel, while it represents the awful danger of the careless and impenitent, proposes to the awakened and enquiring every possible encouragement. And the influence of the Spirit is so agreeable to the gospel, and so consentaneous to reason, that a man never feels the power of divine truth so sensibly, nor exercises his understanding so clearly, as when he is under this heavenly direction.

A person, under true conviction of sin, will be deeply humbled, will see vast unworthiness; will feel his desert of condemnation; will admire God's patience toward so guilty a creature. But horrible, despairing apprehensions are no part of real conviction. The divine Spirit comes to the soul, not like a vulture to terrify and devour, but like a dove to invite and allure.

The Psalmist confesses, that he had felt anxious doubts of God's mercy; but he ascribes them to "his own infirmity," not to the divine Spirit.

If we were to suppose a person enlightened to a view of his own sinfulness, and, at the same time, a stranger to the hopes of the gospel, we might

might expect to find him in a ſtate of horror and diſmay. But they who underſtand the way of ſalvation through a redeemer, will feel hope kindly interpoſing to relieve the terrors of guilt; except where hope is ſecluded by partial views, miſtaken opinions, injudicious counſel, a gloomy temper, or powerful temptations. The goſpel holds up terrors to the impenitent and obſtinate; but the enquiring and returning ſee a hope ſet before them.

You fear, perhaps, that you have never experienced the transforming power of divine grace, becauſe you cannot remember to have felt thoſe amazing terrors, of which you have heard ſome godly people ſpeak. But you muſt conſider, that the goſpel makes no certain degree of terror, the rule by which to judge of the ſincerity of your repentance. This may be various in different ſubjects, according to their different characters and circumſtances. The habitual diſpoſition of your hearts, with reſpect to ſin and holineſs, is a far more certain indication of your character. If you have had thoſe convictions of ſin, which have iſſued in a hatred of it, and in a choice of holineſs, you have had all that are neceſſary. And whatever pangs and terrors you have known, if they have left you in the love, and under the power of ſin, your laſt ſtate is worſe than the firſt. You are to judge of your ſtate, rather by your habitual temper than by any temporary exerciſes. A calm ſedate view of the evil of ſin, accompanied with a juſt apprehenſion

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of the grace and mercy of the gospel, is far more likely to produce a durable good effect, than any violent overbearing terrors. Judas had horror without repentance. Felix was suddenly struck with the fear of a future judgment, but still continued in his sins. The height of religious terrors will not ensure repentance, nor afford an evidence of it. More calm convictions often issue well. The Eunuch became a believer by a rational attention to the gospel; and he went his way rejoicing. Lydia, in hearing the word, felt her heart opened to attend to the truth; and she was judged faithful to the Lord.

I would not be understood to insinuate, that violent convictions *never* precede true repentance. Paul and the jailer trembled and were astonished. But what I intend is, that there may be such convictions without repentance; and that there may be, and often is, repentance produced in a more easy and gentle manner: So that we are to judge of the sincerity of our repentance, rather by its abiding fruits, than by any remarkable circumstances which preceded it.

2. Our subject farther teaches us, that they only are led by the Spirit of God, who are of a dovelike temper.

True christians have in them the mind, which was in Christ, and which was emblematically signified in the gentle and dovelike descent of the Spirit upon him.

The spirit of God is said to dwell in the hearts of believers. They are required to be filled with the

the Spirit. Their having the ſpirit is the teſt, by which they are to judge, whether they belong to Chriſt. "Hereby we know that Chriſt is in us, becauſe he hath given us of his Spirit." "If any man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his."

Now, whether we have the ſpirit of Chriſt, or not, muſt be determined by enquiring, whether we have that benevolent, pure, peaceable and humble temper, which the Spirit produces and preſerves in thoſe hearts where he makes his reſidence. Let us always remember, that the Spirit comes like the dove.

The divine influence will not render men haughty and turbulent, contentious and paſſionate, ſtiff and overbearing, but calm and ſerious, modeſt and teachable, mild and condeſcending. "The wiſdom which is from above, is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocriſy." The apoſtle ſays, "The ſpirits of the prophets are ſubject to the prophets; for God is not the author of confuſion, but of peace." This obſervation he makes in oppoſition to thoſe who excuſed their diſorderly conduct, by alleging, that they were under the high operations of the Spirit. He would have them believe, that a divine operation never produced confuſion in the mind, or diſturbance in the church—never rendered men irrational in their conduct, or troubleſome to

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their brethren—never was carried to ſuch a height, as to deprive them of ſelfcommand, and transform them into madmen.

It is abſurd then to impute to an uncommon influence of the Spirit any error of conduct, exceſs of paſſion, extravagance of zeal, or bitterneſs of cenſure; for the Spirit comes like the dove. He is in the ſtill, ſmall voice; not in the ſtorm, the earthquake and the fire. The fruits of the Spirit are, like his influences, ſweet and benevolent. Theſe are love, joy, peace, longſuffering, gentleneſs, meekneſs, goodneſs, faith and temperance. In theſe the main ſubſtance of religion conſiſts.

True religion makes men humble and ſelfdiſtruſtful; not arrogant and vain. It will not diſpoſe them to talk much of their own goodneſs; but to ſhew out of a good converſation their works with meekneſs of wiſdom. It will not prompt the new convert, or youthful penitent, to aſſume the publick teacher and reprover, but will make him ſwift to hear and ſlow to ſpeak. It will not render the ſtomachs of new born babes difficult and ſqueamiſh, and apt to be diſguſted with plain and wholeſome food—it will teach them to lay apart all guile and hypocriſy, and envy and evil ſpeaking, and to ſeek the ſincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. It will urge men often to the humble exerciſes of devotion—to ſelfexamination, confeſſion, repentance and prayer. But it will not turn the ſecret

devotions

devotions of the cloſet into loud, oſtentatious, phariſaical prayers. It will warm the heart with godly zeal: But this zeal will chooſe to employ itſelf chiefly at home, in perſonal repentance and reformation. Whenever it goes abroad, it will take for its companions, Humility, Prudence and Charity. Bitter zeal deſcends not from heaven. It is not the fruit of that Spirit, which comes like the dove. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God; but the fruit of righteouſneſs is ſown in peace of them who make peace."

That enlightening and convincing influence, which diſcovers to one the corruptions of his own heart, will, of courſe, make him humble. It will diſpoſe him to think others better than himſelf—not to ſay, "Stand by yourſelves, come not near to me, for I am holier than you." That temper, which is a fruit of the Spirit, laments the prevalence of error and wickedneſs. But while it labours to promote chriſtian purity, it labours alſo to promote charity and peace. While it longs for greater unity of ſentiment, it is chiefly ſolicitous to ſee a unity of affection, among chriſtian profeſſors. It reprobates none for ſmall differences, but judges with candour, and ſtudies the things which make for mutual edification.

It is by the exerciſe of ſuch a dovelike temper, that we gain ſatisfactory evidence of our having the ſpirit of Chriſt. Whatever warmth of affection we may have felt on certain occaſions; if,

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in our general conduct, we obey the motions of the flesh, we are not led by the spirit. If we walk in the spirit, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

3. Our subject reminds us of our obligation, to adorn with good works our christian character, and to recommend to the choice of others the religion which we profess. We should resemble the dove, whose wings are covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.

Christians are exhorted to provide things honest in the sight of all men—to adorn the doctrine of their Saviour in all things—to take heed, that their good be not evil spoken of—to think especially of those things, which are of good report.

That we may beautify our christian professions we must see that our *lives* correspond with it. "Let every one who nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity." If in words, we profess to know Christ, but in works deny him, we are abominable. We disgrace our profession and expose it to contempt. We represent religion as an empty, unmeaning thing. Paul says, "Though I speak with the tongue of men and angels, and have not charity, I am as sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal."

We must maintain the *universal* practice of duty. "Then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect to all God's commandments." The beauty of religion appears in its selfconsistency and uniformity. If we seem to be strict

and

and conſcientious in ſome things, while we are looſe and careleſs in others, our religion is diſjointed, miſhapen and deformed.

We muſt particularly attend to the more *important* parts of religion. He who is ſcrupulous in trifles, and licentious in matters of real obligation—he who is ſevere to condemn other people's errors, and yet admits palpable vice in his own practice, ſhews himſelf to be a hypocrite in heart, while, with his mouth, he pretends much zeal.

The beauty of religion much depends on our maintaining the more *amiable* and *engaging* virtues; ſuch as charity, peaceableneſs, humility and meekneſs. However ſerious, devout and godly we may ſeem, if we are ſelfiſh, diſhoneſt, contentious, haughty, rigid and cenſorious, our religion makes but an unſightly and forbidding appearance.

A meek and quiet ſpirit is an ornament of great price in the ſight of God, and of peculiar beauty in the ſight of men.

Chriſtian *prudence* is alſo very neceſſary, that we may enjoy the comfort and diſplay the beauty of our religion. We are required to be *wiſe*, as well as harmleſs—to walk in wiſdom, and ſhew our works with meekneſs of wiſdom. The pious chriſtian, acting under the direction of prudence, does every duty in its proper time, and attends to the various parts of religion in their place, and according to their importance, ſo that all coincide and unite in a beautiful order and ſymmetry.

ſymmetry. While he is conſtant and exact in things of real obligation; in matters of indifference he is eaſy and condeſcending. And while he acts with a liberality of ſentiment, which will be fettered by no human ſyſtems, and enſlaved to no human cuſtoms, he avoids, in his diſcourſe and actions, thoſe incautious freedoms, which, however innocent in themſelves, might grieve the tender minds of his brethren, or embolden ſinners to tranſgreſs.

Our ſubject teaches us our obligation to labour for the increaſe of Chriſt's church—not only to enter into it ourſelves, but alſo to encourage others to come and join themſelves to it.

The ſpirit of the goſpel is repreſented by the ſymbol of the dove. This ſpecies of birds, loves to mingle in flocks. Hence the increaſe of the church is expreſſed by the flying of doves to their windows.

Chriſt came into the world to receive to himſelf a kingdom. He has purchaſed a church with his own blood. He ſends forth his ſervants, to invite all, as many as they find, both bad and good, to come into it, that it may be filled. When, in the increaſe of ſubjects, he ſees the travail of his ſoul, he is ſatisfied.

They who come into his church, ſhould bring with them a dovelike temper. They ſhould come ſenſible of their guilt and weakneſs, and truſting in his grace and power for their ſecurity. They ſhould come with pure and upright intentions, with humble thoughts of themſelves,

with

with meekneſs and love to mankind, and with a fixed purpoſe to maintain their fidelity to Chriſt, and to one another.

That they may ſtrengthen their faith and charity, and confirm their pious reſolutions, they muſt attend on the ordinances of Chriſt's houſe; and that they may promote his cauſe and bring honour to his name, they muſt invite and encourage the attendance of others. They muſt throw no impediments in the way of his little ones; but rather prepare the way, gather out the ſtones, and take up the ſtumbling blocks.

There are many things, which hinder the growth of Chriſt's church. Theſe we ſhould be ſolicitous to remove.

The careleſs and irregular lives of chriſtian profeſſors are a ſtumbling block to many.

However unjuſt it may be, there are many who will reproach the whole church for the faults of particular members. And ſuch reproaches often operate as hinderances to ſerious people, who would gladly enjoy the privileges of religious communion. If a church countenances, or tolerates known immoralities in any of her members, ſhe becomes a partaker of their guilt. But there may be irregularities, which are known only to a few, and for which the church collectively is not reſponſible. And there are many unguarded liberties taken by profeſſors, which, though really diſhonourable to religion, cannot eaſily be made matters of publick diſcipline.

Now, as we would prevent, or remove ſuch ſtumbling blocks, we muſt walk inoffenſively ourſelves; and, when there is occaſion, reprove and exhort one another in the ſpirit of meekneſs. The way to promote the purity of the church is preſcribed by the apoſtle.—" Let us cleanſe *ourſelves* from all filthineſs of the fleſh and of the Spirit."

Controverſies among chriſtians often have an unhappy influence on the young and tender.

When they ſee the profeſſors of the ſame religion withdrawing from each other's fellowſhip for differences in doctrine or diſcipline, they are thrown into doubts, what denomination to chooſe, and eventually perhaps they think contemptuouſly of all, and join with none.

To remove this ſtumbling block, we muſt behave toward each other with the dovelike ſpirit of meekneſs, condeſcenſion and love—never contend about little things, nor renounce communion with a church for trivial errors. To reject a church, which God has received, is to exalt ourſelves above him. And, concerning every church, we are to hope, that God has received her till ſhe appears to have admitted eſſential corruptions; and to retain them, after means of reformation have been uſed.

Some caſt ſtumbling blocks in the way of others, by demanding in a church greater purity, than any means, which Chriſt has put into our hands, are competent to effect.

No

No church on earth, however good are her aims, and however vigilant her diſcipline, can prevent all impurity. Even the churches planted by the apoſtles had ſome corrupt and ungodly members. "The kingdom of God is like a net caſt into the ſea, which gathers of every kind; and when they have brought it to the ſhore, they gather the good into veſſels, and caſt the bad away. So ſhall it be in the end of the world. Then the wicked ſhall be ſevered from among the juſt."

Now if we reprobate in the groſs thoſe churches, which have in their communion ſome unregenerate perſons, we lay ſtumbling blocks before the weak; for, ¿ Where ſhall a church be found, to which they may venture to join?

Some lay hinderances in the way of others, by ſcandalizing the churches of Chriſt, as if they *profeſſedly* received, and *knowingly* tolerated wicked and ungodly perſons.

This, I ſuppoſe, is a groundleſs reproach. However negligent ſome churches may be in the diſcipline of offenders, yet I know of none which acts on ſo lax a principle. The churches require of their members a profeſſed belief of, and ſubjection to the goſpel of Chriſt; but they pretend not to be judges of the ſincerity of the heart. They may probably admit, and retain ſome, who give not all that evidence of their real godlineſs, which might be wiſhed: But then it ſhould be conſidered, that they are veſted with no other authority than what Chriſt has given them in his

word; and that this is given for edification, not for deſtruction. They have from him no warrant to exclude men from the privileges of his houſe, but in a way of diſcipline. They may not cut them off arbitrarily, but only by a manifeſtation of their wickedneſs.

Some embarraſs the way to Chriſt's church by dreadful repreſentations of the peculiar guilt incurred by approaching it in unregeneracy. They ſtate the caſe in ſuch a manner, that many will conclude, it is ſafeſt to forbear, until they have full and indubitable evidence of their converſion.

But this is ſtating the caſe incautiouſly. Chriſt commands all to come into his church, and to come in the ſincerity of repentance and faith. He allows no man to turn away from it; and no man to enter into it for vile and wicked ends. A perſon's doubts concerning the goodneſs of his ſtate, are not a reaſon why he ſhould neglect this, or any other duty; but a reaſon, why he ſhould examine himſelf, repent of his ſins, and amend his ways. No man ſhould be deterred from entering into the church, by an apprehenſion, that this, if he is unconverted, will be a greater ſin than to abſent himſelf. For he is not to deliberate how he may ſin moſt ſafely, but to be watchful that he may not ſin at all. The wicked man is no where ſafe, neither in the church, nor out of it. He who came to the marriage, and continued there without a wedding garment, and they who refuſed to come at all, were puniſhed with equal ſeverity. No man ought to attend

tend on divine ordinances, in a formal and hypocritical manner; and no ſerious perſon ought to neglect them, from doubts concerning his habitual ſtate. Let every one examine his preſent views and aims. He who is conſcious that he acts under a ſenſe of his obligation to God, and with a deſire and intention to do his will, may be encouraged from hence to draw near to him; nor ſhould he indulge the apprehenſion, that there is for him greater ſafety without, than within the church; or real ſafety any where, but in the path of duty, and in a ſtate of favour with God.

Permit me to add:——There are ſome profeſſors of religion, who greatly obſtruct the growth and edification of the church, by their imprudent cavils at the preaching, and illiberal animadverſions on the conduct of miniſters, eſpecially in the preſence of children and youth, and in the company of the weak, unſtable and diſaffected. We, who are miniſters, are conſcious of many imperfections; and we thank our people when they favour us with their friendly advice. But if they only talk againſt us by the walls, and in the doors of their houſes, we conſider them, as obſtructing our influence, and weakening our hands; as encouraging the enemies of religion, and pulling down the church of Chriſt, which we ſhould all unite to build up and eſtabliſh.

To conclude. As we wiſh to promote the growth of Chriſt's church, let us walk worthy of him, who has called us to his kingdom and glo-

ry; ſtudy the things which make for peace; condeſcend to each other in caſes of difference; contribute to the purity of the church by the holineſs of our own lives; encourage thoſe in whom hopeful diſpoſitions appear; lead them by our counſels and examples; thus prepare the way and take up the ſtumbling blocks which cauſe many to fall; and let us pray for the happy time, when converts ſhall flock into the kingdom of Chriſt as clouds, and as doves to their windows.

END OF THE FORTYFOURTH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XLV.

Parting with Friends, a painful Trial.

PSALM lxxxviii. 18.

Lover and friend haſt thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkneſs.

THE author of this pſalm is called *Heman* the Ezrahite. He was not the celebrated muſician of that name, who lived in David's time; for that was a deſcendant of *Levi* from his ſon *Kohath*, and is therefore called a *Kohathite*. This was probably a deſcendant of *Judah* from his ſon *Zerah*. In what time he lived, and on what occaſion he compoſed this pſalm, is uncertain. From ſeveral expreſſions, however, in the pſalm, it is probable, that he lived in the time of the captivity; and, being a perſon of diſtinction, was confined in ſome lonely priſon, and excluded from intercourſe with his particular friends. It is evident, at leaſt, that ſome diſ-

treſſing affliction gave occaſion to theſe meditations; for they all run in a penſive and mournful ſtrain. In his affliction, there was one circumſtance, which he felt with the moſt tender ſenſibility; and that was ſeparation from his former acquaintance. He ſays, verſe 8th, "Thou haſt put away mine acquaintance far from me; and haſt made me an abomination to them: I am ſhut up, and I cannot come forth." The ſame complaint he repeats at the cloſe of the pſalm.—"Lover and friend, haſt thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkneſs."

Many of his near friends, probably, were dead, having been ſlain by the Chaldeans. Some, perhaps, were confined in priſons remote from him, ſo that he could receive no viſits from them. He could only ſit, and mourn, in ſolitude, his painful condition. That ſoft and tender ſolace, which ſympathizing converſation among fellow ſufferers is wont to afford, was now denied to him. But there was one conſolation, of which the world could not deprive him, communion with God and meditation on his providence.

The words of our text will lead us to contemplate, the pleaſures and advantages of friendſhip —the painful trial of parting with friends—and the conſolation, which, under ſuch trials, is derived from a belief of God's governing providence.

I. The happineſs of life greatly depends on intimate friendſhips.

God made man for ſociety; and it is not good for him to be alone. In a ſtate of ſolitude, he could

could neither enjoy the world, nor himſelf. His natural paſſions prompt him, and his unavoidable wants impel him, to aſſociate with others.

The power of ſpeech, given us by the Creator, ſhews that we were deſigned for mutual intercourſe; for, in ſolitude, this faculty would be uſeleſs.

We are naturally dependent on one another. No man is ſufficient to relieve his own neceſſities. It is by an interchange of cares and labours, that mankind ſubſiſt in a tolerable condition.

Man alone would make but ſlow progreſs in mental improvement. It is by mutual communication of experience and acquirement, that our powers are enlarged, and our knowledge advanced. The knowledge which one acquires would be of but ſmall uſe, if it was confined to himſelf; and more than half the pleaſure of it would be loſt to himſelf, if he had not opportunity to impart it to others.

As we cannot maintain an actual intercourſe with the human race in general, we are naturally led to form particular friendſhips. Heman, among his acquaintance, found ſome who were his friends and lovers. The divine Saviour, whoſe benevolence extended to all men, embraced ſome as his intimate friends. He regarded with ſpecial affection, thoſe who received his doctrines. Among the believers in Judea, there were ſome whoſe houſes he made the place of his retreat; and, in the family of his diſciples, there

was

was one, diſtinguiſhed by the name of the diſciple whom he loved.

In this world of change and trial, we find much ſatisfaction and refreſhment in having friends near us, with whom we may often converſe—to whom we can communicate our ſentiments and feelings—from whom we can receive advice and aſſiſtance in our troubles—and in whoſe fidelity and affection we can place unſuſpecting confidence.

Such friendſhips are always uſeful; but their importance is never ſo ſenſibly realized as in times of adverſity. When burdens lie heavy upon us, and our ſtrength is ſinking under them, we rejoice to find one at hand, on whoſe friendly arm we can lean—into whoſe open boſom we can pour our complaints—and whoſe ſympathizing prayers will aſcend with ours to the throne of grace.

Heman ſays, "My ſoul is full of troubles; I am as a man who hath no ſtrength—my acquaintance is put far from me." A more melancholly ſtate, than this which he deſcribes, can hardy be imagined—preſſed with ſorrow, deprived of ſtrength, and removed from friends.

Friendſhip is neceſſary on religious accounts.

Religion itſelf is of a ſocial nature. It greatly conſiſts in benevolent diſpoſitions and friendly offices. Friendſhip, founded on virtuous principles, ſoftens and humanizes the heart, and promotes a general philanthropy—a good will to all around us. In the progreſs of the chriſtian

temper,

temper, we add to brotherly kindneſs, charity. By what we feel in our own particular connexions, we learn what others feel in theirs, and thus we more ſenſibly intereſt ourſelves in their joys and ſorrows.

Virtuous friendſhip, is ſubſervient to piety. Mutual example and converſation warm a godly zeal, confirm good reſolutions, fortify the ſoul againſt temptations, and facilitate the difficult duties of religion. "Iron ſharpeneth iron, ſo a manſharpeneth the countenance of his friend:"—"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: So doth the ſweetneſs of a man's friend by hearty counſel."

There is no kind of friendſhip ſo intimate and uſeful, as the *domeſtick*. This, perhaps, our Pſalmiſt had particularly in view when he ſpake, in ſuch an affectionate manner, of the removal of acquaintance, lover and friend.

This friendſhip, which is uſually founded in affection, is ſtrengthened and confirmed by unity of intereſt, reciprocal offices of kindneſs, and daily intercourſe and converſation. In the expreſſive language of ſcripture, the parties are "one fleſh." Their views, deſigns and concerns are the ſame, they have a common relation to thoſe who deſcend from them—their affections meet and mingle in the ſame objects—and, by degrees, the fibres of their hearts become ſo interwoven and intwiſted, that a ſeparation cannot be made without diſtreſſing pangs and bleeding wounds.

We propoſed,

II. To

II. To contemplate the painful trial of parting with intimate friends. This Heman laments as the fevereſt circumſtance in his affliction, that "lover and friend were put far from him." The removal of any friend is an affliction that muſt be felt, but nothing wounds the heart ſo deeply as the diſſolution of the conjugal connexion. This croſſes the ſtrongeſt affection, and fruſtrates the moſt pleaſing hopes of the ſurviving partner. It brings on a gloomy train of new and unexperienced cares. Every riſing care revives a pungent ſenſe of the loſs ſuſtained. In former afflictions, there was the ſolace of mutual ſympathy. In this the penſive mourner ſits alone and keeps ſilence, finding none, to whom the feelings of the heart can be communicated, or who can take an equal ſhare in its anguiſh. The anguiſh is augmented by a recollection of paſt delights, which now are fled, to return no more. The ſight of children deprived of one who naturally cared for them, ſwells the tide of grief. When the deſolate mourner walks abroad, nature appears covered with a gloom; and when he treads the empty chamber, abſorbed in ſilent meditation, the hollow dome ſadly echoes to the ſound of his feet, and mournfully whiſpers back his deep fetched ſighs. Every object which meets his eyes—every ſound which ſtrikes his ears, reminds him that lover and friend is put far from him, and his acquaintance into darkneſs.

Reflection

Reflection eaſily convinces us, that ſuch an affliction is great: How great, experience only can realize.

The ſcripture, which is always juſt and natural in its deſcriptions, places this among the moſt grievous adverſities. God ſays to the prophet Ezekiel, "Son of man, behold, I take away from thee, the deſire of thine eyes with a ſtroke: Yet neither ſhalt thou mourn nor weep; neither ſhall tears run down thy cheeks."—This is not to be underſtood as a general prohibition of mourning for the loſs of friends; but as an intimation, that the prophet's affliction would be ſo great and ſudden, as to confound and aſtoniſh him, lock up the avenues of tears, and render him incapable of the relief which nature affords in more moderate afflictions. In this, Ezekiel was a ſign to the children of Iſrael. He ſays, "I ſpake to the people in the morning, and at even my wife died; and I did as I was commanded. And the people ſaid unto me, ¿ Wilt thou not tell us, what theſe things are to us? And I anſwered them, Thus ſaith the Lord, I will profane my ſanctuary, the excellency of your ſtrength, and the deſire of your eyes; and that which your ſoul pitieth; and your children ſhall fall by the ſword; and ye ſhall do as I have done; ye ſhall not mourn nor weep, but ſhall pine away in your iniquities."—The greatneſs of that diſtreſs, which ſhould attend the deſolation of Judea, is here aptly repreſented by the ſudden death of the prophet's wife; an event which left him in

ſuch

ſuch ſolitary, deep felt anguiſh, as groans could not expreſs, nor tears relieve.

A ſtate of great and helpleſs calamity, is alſo expreſſed by a ſtate of widowhood. The prophet Jeremiah deſcribing the deſolation of Jeruſalem, ſays, "How doth the city ſit ſolitary that was full of people! How is ſhe become a widow! She hath none to comfort her." Widowhood is conſidered, in ſcripture, as a ſtate peculiarly helpleſs and pitiable.

Hence we meet with ſo many cautions not to oppreſs the widow; and ſo many injunctions to relieve and defend her. The apoſtles conſidered the caſes of thoſe who were widows and deſolate, as intitled to ſpecial attention. For ſuch the primitive church made particular proviſion. When Jeſus ſaw the breathleſs body of a young man carried forth to the grave, a circumſtance in the caſe, which touched his benevolent heart, was, that this was the only ſon of his mother, and ſhe was a widow. Pitying her affliction, he ſtopped the proceſſion, awoke the dead, and reſtored him to her alive.

The language of ſcripture, in ſuch tender caſes, correſponds with the feelings of nature.

We proceed to ſhew,

That in this, as indeed in every affliction, the beſt conſolation is drawn from a belief of, and meditation upon, God's governing providence.

In the loſs of friends, Heman acknowledged God's holy and ſovereign hand. "*Thou* haſt put them far from me."

This

This conſideration ſilenced David's complaint: "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, becauſe thou didſt it." Job felt the influence of the ſame ſentiment. "The Lord gave; and he hath taken away; and bleſſed be his name."

All events are under the direction of God's hand. The circumſtances of our life, the time and manner of our death, the relations which we ſuſtain, and the, continuance and diſſolution of the connexions which we form, are ordered and determined by his providence. To him the ſcripture aſcribes, not only great, but ſmall; not only miraculous, but common occurrences; not only the ſuſpenſion, but the operation of the laws of nature; yea alſo, the events in which human agency is concerned, as well as thoſe which ſeem to proceed more immediately from him.

Hence good men derive their ſtrongeſt conſolation amidſt the viciſſitudes and adverſities of this mortal ſtate.

God is ſupreme and above all: He gives not an account of his matters: ¿ Who ſhall ſay to him, What doeſt thou? Though he is high, he has reſpect to the lowly; the hairs of their head are all numbered. Though his judgments are unſearchable, yet we know that they are right, and no injury can we fear from him. His wiſdom is perfect; it clearly views every circumſtance of our condition, and exactly traces all the connexions of things, even to the remoteſt ages of eternity; it can judge for us with ſafety in ſeaſons of greateſt darkneſs; and can overrule, for our

good,

good, the afflictions, which are moſt threatening in their appearance, and moſt painful to bear. He is very pitiful and of tender mercy: He afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men; but corrects them for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holineſs; he is a very preſent help to thoſe who are in trouble; he invites them to call upon him, and aſſures them of his gracious attention. And though what he does, they know not now, he has given them his faithful promiſe, that no evil ſhall happen to the juſt, but all things ſhall work together for their good.

This life is a ſhort period of probation for eternal happineſs. In the proſpect of approaching glory, believers may rejoice, though now, for a ſeaſon, if need be, they are in heavineſs, through manifold temptations.

A ſtate of mortality muſt neceſſarily be attended with affliction. The connexions, and relations, which exiſt among the human race, are proper for the preſent ſtate. We could not ſubſiſt, nor the world be continued without them. The reciprocal affection which reſults from theſe connexions, is exceedingly uſeful and happy. It ſweetens and endears the relations of life, and facilitates the relative and ſocial duties. But ſtill it is a ſpring of bitter anguiſh, when theſe connexions are broken. Without it we cannot enjoy the pleaſures, nor diſcharge the duties, of friendſhip. And while we have it, we cannot but feel the ſtroke, which parts from us lover and friend, and hides them long in darkneſs.

Affliction

Affliction muſt therefore be an attendant on ſuch a condition as the Creator has here aſſigned us.

We wonder, perhaps, why ſo benevolent a Being ſhould place his creatures in a condition ſubject to ſo much ſorrow. But we ſhould reflect, that this affection, from which ſorrow ſprings, is, on the whole, a ſource of ſuperiour enjoyment. We derive from it more pleaſure than pain. The greater part of our preſent happineſs ariſes from friendſhip and ſociety. The love which unites friends, makes their connexion happy while it laſts. It is the lot of moſt men to enjoy, through life, more friends than they loſe. The pain of ſeparation is indeed more pungent, but leſs permanent, than the pleaſure of the union. Time, reaſon and grace, improve and heighten the latter, but kindly mitigate and ſoften the former.

Let it alſo be remembered, that this life is only a ſmall part of our exiſtence—a ſhort trial in order to laſting happineſs; and "theſe preſent light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory."

They admoniſh us of the ſhortneſs of life and quicken us to improve it.

Cool lectures on human frailty, and general obſervations on the mortality of our race, often leave the heart unaffected. But the removal of a near and intimate friend brings the thoughts of death home to our feelings. When the awful ſtroke comes within the walls of our own chamber—within the curtains of our own bed, we

cannot reſiſt the impreſſion of this ſerious truth, that *we* muſt alſo fall. We ſhall then, if at any time, feel how ſhort and tranſient this life is; enter into a ſerious examination of ourſelves; and form new reſolutions to improve the uncertain remains of life in the practice of religion.

The vanity of the world never appears more manifeſt, than when they, on whom our worldly joys chiefly depended, are removed into darkneſs. How empty the world looks to one, whom lover and friend have forſaken! ¿ What finds he now worth living for? In this ſolitary condition his meditations will riſe to that better ſtate, where more laſting connexions will be formed, and theſe melancholy changes will afflict him no more.

The removal of friends is an admonition to draw near to God, and place our hope in him. "She that is a widow indeed, truſts in God, and continues in prayers and ſupplications night and day." And well ſhe may; for God, her maker and her huſband, has given her this kind invitation and promiſe, "Leave thy fatherleſs children, I will preſerve them; and let the widow truſt in me." When friends are about us, we place a confidence, alas! too great a confidence in them. When they are put into darkneſs, we feel how juſt is this caution, "Truſt not in man, whoſe breath is in his noſtrils; ¿For wherein is he to be accounted of? We then repair to God as the only unfailing friend. On him we caſt our cares, and to him we make

known

known our requeſts. We find our ſouls more enlarged in communion with him; can open our hearts more freely and fully; perceive a greater ſenſibility of mind, fervency of deſire, fixedneſs of attention, and copiouſneſs of expreſſion, than we ever found in thoſe dull periods of life, when proſperity deadened our affections, and the world engroſſed our thoughts.

Religion now ſtands confeſſed in its reality and importance.

In the ſmooth ſeaſons of life, we can paſs along with little help from religion. We ſatisfy ourſelves, perhaps, with a general belief of its truth, and a formal attendance on its duties. But in the day of affliction, we find no ſource of real comfort, but in religion. We look not to the world for relief; for this we ſee to be full of ſorrow and diſappointment. It is only a belief of God's perfections and government, a conſciouſneſs of our love to him, an application of his promiſes, and a hope of future joys, that can make affliction ſit ſoft and eaſy upon us, and enable us with dignity to ſuſtain its weight.

When a friend is removed, we naturally think how important religion was to him: But our thoughts, which anxiouſly follow him to another world, ſoon return back in this home-felt reflection; "As neceſſary as religion was to him, ſo neceſſary it is to us. We are as mortal as he was. Our ſolicitude muſt be no more about thoſe who are gone before us; but about ourſelves who are ſoon to follow them."

We now learn the reaſonableneſs of contentment.

At ordinary times, how anxious are we about our worldly condition! How fearful of this and the other poſſible evil! How eaſily diſcompoſed by trifling incidents! But now, when a real affliction has befallen us, trifles appear what they are. We ſee that former occaſions of diſquietude, were unworthy of the attention which we gave them. We now think, we could ſubmit to them all, without one uneaſy thought, if we might be, as in months paſt, when our lover and friend was with us. We now learn to rebuke thoſe fooliſh anxieties, which, in proſperous days, ſo often vexed our ſpirits, and embittered our comforts.

Affliction teaches us humility.

When we look on the breathleſs remains of an intimate friend, we ſee what all men are—what we ourſelves are—creatures of duſt, returning to duſt again. ¿ What is all the glory of man, but a fading flower? ¿ What is all the pride of worldly diſtinction, but vanity and corruption? ¿ What can we ſee, as a pretence for exultation, in ourſelves, who are ſinners, under ſentence of death?

Affliction teaches us compaſſion.

While we feel the ſorrow which attends the diſſolution of our intimate connexions, we learn what others feel in ſimilar trials: We ſee the propriety of the apoſtle's advice; "Remember them who are in bonds, as bound with them; and

and thoſe who ſuffer adverſity, as being yourſelves alſo in the body."

Finally;——The death of friends is of uſe to awaken into exerciſe our faith in Jeſus Chriſt, who died to redeem us from the grave; has riſen to aſſure us of immortality; has aſcended to prepare for us a place in heaven; and now lives that we might live alſo.

Let us extend our views to that glorious ſtate whither he is gone; live under the influence of his religion, in imitation of his example, and in the hopes of his kingdom; and thus conſole our hearts in all the ſorrows of life, reckoning that all the ſufferings of the preſent time, are unworthy to be compared with the glory which ſhall be revealed.

THE END OF THE FORTYFIFTH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XLVI.

Thankfulneſs to God for his daily Benefits.

PSALM, lxviii. 19.

Bleſſed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our ſalvation.

A BEING, whoſe preſence pervades the univerſe, whoſe power ſuſtains all worlds, and whoſe goodneſs ſupplies the wants of every living thing, is the moſt grand and delightful thought, that can fill and warm the human mind. To contemplate the perfections and works of this Being, to adore him for what he is, and praiſe him for what he does, is the nobleſt exerciſe, that can employ a rational creature. This is the principal work of angels and ſaints in heaven, and not a ſmall part of the employment of godly ſouls on earth.

Sudden

Sudden and surprising interpositions of providence may deeply affect those, who in ordinary circumstances, live without God in the world. But they, whose minds are formed to an habitual sense of his government, will seriously observe his daily benefits, and regard them as calls to daily devotion. Under a sense of *these*, David was pressed with a load of gratitude, of which he could disburthen himself only by daily praise.

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits."

To illustrate the propriety of this acknowledgment; and to shew our obligations to praise our great Benefactor, is the design of the present discourse.

I. We will illustrate the propriety of David's thankful acknowledgment.

Common and daily mercies are those, with which we are principally loaded. From them arise our highest obligations to gratitude. For,

1. God's daily benefits are, by far, the most *numerous*.

"¿ How precious are his thoughts unto us? ¿ How great is the sum of them? If we should count them, they are more in number than the sand."—"How many are the wonderful works, which he has done; and his thoughts, which are to usward! They cannot be reckoned up in order to him. If we would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

The frame of our bodies, and the faculties of our minds display the goodness of the Creator.

"I will praiſe thee," ſays David, "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvellous are thy works, and that my ſoul knoweth right well.

How curious, and complicated is the body in which we reſide! Every part is adapted to ſome important end. Every member has its obvious uſe: Every veſſel and fibre anſwers ſome eſſential purpoſe in the animal economy.

The ſeveral ſenſes are miniſters of information and enjoyment. They ſtand as monitors to warn us of danger, and wait as guides to direct us in our path.

As this decaying frame is kept in repair by continual nutrition, the Creator has put within us an appetite for our neceſſary food, that the daily uſe of it may be accompanied with delight, and the means of procuring it may be purſued with cheerfulneſs.

The natural paſſions, acting in their proper places, appear to be eſſential parts of our conſtitution, and diſplay the wiſdom and goodneſs of him who made us. *Fear* guards us from danger—deſire quickens our purſuit of happineſs—*hope* animates and ſweetens our labours—*ſhame* reſtrains us from unworthy actions—*love* unites us in ſociety—*compaſſion* intereſts us in each other's welfare, and prompts our exertions for the relief of diſtreſs.

As our infant ſtate is helpleſs and dependent, God has implanted in the parent's breaſt a ſtrong affection for his offspring, which, while it ſecures

them

them from neglect, ſweetens his duty to them, and comforts him in the toil of his hands.

To preſide over the inferior powers, the inſpiration of the Almighty has given us underſtanding. This elevates us above the animal tribes, and renders us capable of ſuperiour ſervices, enjoyments and proſpects.

"The earth is full of his riches." The table of his providence is widely ſpread, and bountifully furniſhed, to ſupply our outward wants, and gratify our natural deſires.

"The heavens declare his glory:" The ſun enlightens and warms us with his beams; and, when he retires, the moon and ſtars hang out their lamps to abate the gloom and ſoften the horrors of night. The winds, by their various motions, preſerve the ſalubrity of the air, waft around the clouds freighted with enriching ſhowers, mitigate the ſultry heat of the ſummer's ſun, kindly fan the weary laborer and the panting animal, facilitate the proceſs of vegetation, and aid the intercourſe of diſtant nations.

We are viſited with unfailing returns of day and night, which alternately invite us to labour and reſt. The viciſſitude of the ſeaſons, without which the greater part of the globe would be incapable of habitation, is regularly maintained.

The heavens and the earth hold out to our view, various objects of contemplation for the improvement of the mind. They preſent us with ſcenes of grandeur to ſtrike us with aſtoniſhment: They exhibit works of wiſdom to

raiſe

raiſe our admiration: They diſcover endleſs proofs of divine bounty to excite our gratitude.

Beſides theſe daily benefits, which are common to all, every one may recollect a thouſand perſonal and domeſtick favours; ſuch as the continuance of his reaſon and health; ſucceſs in his calling; deliverance from danger; a capacity for refreſhment and repoſe; the joys of peace and friendſhip; and quietneſs and ſafety in his dwelling. God compaſſes our paths by day, and our beds by night: He keeps us while we ſleep; and when we awake we are ſtill with him. To the bleſſings of his providence are added thoſe of his grace. By his lively oracles and inſtituted worſhip, he affords us the means of ſpiritual knowledge and comfort. Through the redemption of his Son he offers us the pardon of ſin, the aſſiſtance of his ſpirit, acceſs to him in prayer, and the light of his countenance.

Theſe are not tranſient, but permanent privileges. He continues them to us, until, by putting them away, we judge ourſelves unworthy of them. Lo, theſe are a part of his ways. In vain we attempt to recount his benefits: As well may we number the ſtars of heaven, which, while we gaze, loſe all diſtinction, and mingle in one general glow.

2. Daily benefits are the *greateſt* in their nature.

Theſe are eſſential not only to our temporary exiſtence in this life, but to our eternal happineſs in

in the next. Compared with *these*, the mercies, which we call *special*, are of small importance.

A providential deliverance from unforeseen danger will deeply affect the mind: But, ¿ Are we not more indebted to divine goodness for the prevention of such danger? It is a mercy to be snatched from the jaws of death: But, ¿ Is it not a superiour mercy to be preserved from falling into this extremity? Recovery from severe sickness is a favour: But, ¿ Is not continued health a far greater favour? The sudden accumulation of property, by God's blessing on our lawful designs, would be regarded, at least, with a transient gratitude: ¿ Shall we then forget the daily supply of our wants, and the daily success of our labours? These are bounties of superiour consequence.

Still more precious is the privilege of daily converse with God's word, access to his throne, hope in his mercy, and assistance from his spirit.

3. Daily benefits are the most *extensive*.

The man, in whom the benevolence of the gospel reigns, rejoices with them who rejoice. The pleasure which results from his personal blessings, is heightened by a participation in the blessings enjoyed by others. Special and extraordinary favours are the lot of but few, and of these but seldom. Ordinary mercies flow every where; they appear widely spread among the human race. In the contemplation of these, as enjoyed by mankind in general, the benevolent heart rejoices daily. In the view of the other it can rejoice but

rarely,

rarely, becauſe they are thinly ſcattered, and ſeldom ſeen. Great riches, elevated honours, and remarkable ſucceſs in buſineſs, if they are to be called benefits, yet are benefits vouchſafed to a ſmall proportion of mankind; and they are oftener the objects of envy, than of real, ſincere congratulation. They yield little ſatisfaction to the poſſeſſors, and little pleaſure to the ſpectators. Common mercies are ſo equably diffuſed, that they offer no provocation to envy; and ſo generally enjoyed, that the good man, every where, meets a gratification of his benevolent wiſhes.

The heavens declare the glory, and the earth diſplays the goodneſs of God to all men. The common Parent cauſes his ſun to ſhine, and his ſhowers to fall promiſcuouſly, on the rich and the poor, on the evil and the good. The ſeaſons diſpenſe their influence, and the earth diſtributes its bounties without partiality. Health and competence are indulged to men in general, for much the greater part of life. There are few, who cannot number more days of eaſe, ſecurity and fulneſs, than of pain, terror and want.

The bleſſings of God's grace are held out to men, with a free and undiſtinguiſhing hand. Pardon is offered, on the ſame terms, to ſinners of every deſcription. The doors of heaven are ſet open for the reception of all who will enter. The aids and comforts of God's Spirit are promiſed, without exception, to all who ſeek them. In Chriſt Jeſus there is neither bond nor free, Greek nor Jew, but all are one in him.

4. Common

4. Common mercies are *permanent*, becauſe they are *neceſſary*. Special benefits are but *occaſional*, and therefore *tranſient*. We neither need them often, nor can enjoy them long. As they uſually ſucceed ſome great affliction, or imminent danger, they are well ſuited to awaken the ſlumbering mind into gratitude and praiſe. But we cannot receive them often, becauſe we are not often in adverſity. We are continually with God. He guides us by his counſel, protects us by his power, and ſupplies us by his goodneſs. The mercies which attend us one day, return with the returning day. They fail not; they are new every morning.

We ſee how juſtly it may be ſaid, "We are daily loaded with benefits." Our daily mercies are *innumerable*—they are of *infinite weight*—they are *conſtant*—they are extended to *all*.

While we enjoy them ourſelves, we may look around, and ſee thouſands ſharing them with us. The pleaſures of benevolence may unite with the joys of gratitude, to enliven and exalt our praiſe.

II. Let us now contemplate our obligations to render praiſe to the God of our ſalvation.

Bleſſings which flow from pure, ſelfmoving goodneſs and love, without any merit on our part, or ſelfiſhneſs on the part of the giver, are the proper matter of our thankſgiving. Such are all the bleſſings which come from God. It is not his own profit, nor our worthineſs; but his mercy, and our neceſſity, which move him to beſtow them. As he is poſſeſſed of infinite wiſdom and

power,

power, he can need nothing from his creatures, and can have no motive out of himſelf—no motive but his own goodneſs, to diſpenſe his favours to them. He is not worſhipped by men's hands, as though he needed any thing from them, ſeeing he gives to them life, and breath and all things.—"Of him, through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." We are not only dependent, but guilty: We have done nothing to merit, but much to forfeit, the bleſſings of God's love. In this view our obligations to gratitude are mightily increaſed. His mercies and our iniquities are heightened by the contraſt. Our iniquities, committed againſt his rich mercy, are vaſtly aggravated. His mercy, exerciſed amidſt all our guilt is inconceivably exalted. The Pſalmiſt contemplates them together, that he may feel the ſtronger ſenſe of both. "Many, O Lord, are thy wonderful works, and thy thoughts which are to usward. They are more than can be numbered."—"Mine iniquities have taken hold on me, ſo that I cannot look up. They are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me."

For God's innumerable and unmerited benefits, our gratitude and obedience is a proper return; and the more ſo, becauſe this is the only return we can make. "What ſhall I render to the Lord," ſays David, "for all his benefits? I will take the cup of ſalvation, and call upon the name of the Lord; I will offer the ſacrifice of thankſgiving. I will pay my vows to the Lord."

Our

Our obligation to praiſe God is as plain and undeniable, as our obligation to love, truſt, or fear him. It ariſes from his character, and our relation to him. If we ought to love him, becauſe he is perfect—to fear him becauſe he is almighty—to truſt in him, becauſe he is allſufficient; then we ought to be thankful to him and bleſs his name, becauſe he is the God of ſalvation, who daily loads us with benefits.

"It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord; it is pleaſant, and praiſe is comely." Praiſe employs our nobleſt powers, ſweetens the temper, expels anxious cares, ſtills the murmurs of diſcontent, ſmooths the rude paſſions, and compoſes the ſoul, in the day of adverſity, to cheerful hope and reſignation.

What can diſturb and ruffle a mind filled with a delightful ſenſe of God's righteous government, and daily employed in the grateful contemplation of his wonderful goodneſs and love? This exerciſe is adapted to raiſe us above the world, and fit us for heaven. It is the employment of ſaints and angels there; and will be ours, when we arrive there.

Charity is greater than faith and hope, becauſe theſe will ceaſe with life; but that will never fail. Praiſe is better than prayer and humiliation, becauſe theſe are exerciſes which belong only to the preſent ſtate; that will be the everlaſting buſineſs of happy ſpirits above.

A pious man needs no arguments to evince his obligation to this duty. He feels it juſt as he

feels

feels his obligation to love and fear God. It is his very temper. A view of God's character excites his admiration and praiſe. A recollection of divine benefits awakens his gratitude and joy.

Our ſubject will eaſily ſuggeſt to us ſome uſeful reflections.

1. How vaſt are our obligations to our heavenly Benefactor!

If obligations are proportionable to benefits received, ours muſt be immenſe; for we are daily loaded with benefits. If a friend ſhould relieve us in a time of helpleſs diſtreſs, or reſcue us from death in the moment of deſpairing anguiſh, his kindneſs would leave on our hearts an impreſſion of gratitude, which time could not obliterate. We ſhould delight to ſee his face. We ſhould often ſeek his company. With pleaſure we ſhould repeat to him, and relate to others, the ſtory of our calamity and deliverance. ¿ And ſhall we forget the God of our ſalvation, who has not only reſcued us from danger and diſtreſs, but prevented us with the bleſſings of his goodneſs? The bleſſings which he beſtows are of infinite value, continued from day to day, and numerous as the moments of our lives. How our obligations increaſe! How ſhould our gratitude ſwell and overflow! ¿ Who can utter the mighty acts of our God?—¿ Who can ſhew forth all his praiſe? The grateful heart feels more than the mouth can expreſs.—The Pſalmiſt ſays, "Praiſe waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion." The margin renders it more emphatically, "Praiſe is *ſilent* before thee."

When

When praiſe attempts to ſpeak God's goodneſs, it falters—it ſinks into ſilence under the weight of the ſubject—it waits in ſolemn ſuſpenſe to know what to ſay; and, after all, rather admires than utters the memory of God's great goodneſs.

2. Our ſubject ſtrongly urges us to daily devotion.

The Pſalmiſt ſays; "Every day will I praiſe thee, and bleſs thy name forever."——"It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, to praiſe thy name, O moſt high; to ſhew forth thy loving kindneſs in the morning, and thy faithfulneſs, every night."

The daily worſhip of God by prayer and thankſgiving, is a duty ſo plainly reſulting from our continual dependence on him, and his unceaſing bounty to us, that a thinking mind cannot but diſcern it, and a pious heart cannot but feel it. And if, in private devotion, we ought to recollect and acknowledge perſonal favours; for the ſame reaſon, families are bound to recognize their common bleſſings, and with united voices to expreſs their common gratitude and joy.

3. How unreaſonable is envy and diſcontent!

When we look round on our fellow mortals, we ſee thoſe whom we imagine to be in a more eligible condition than ourſelves. But perhaps we misjudge. We ſee only the brighter ſide of their condition, and we attend to the dark ſide of our own. In our ſtate, there are agreeable circumſtances, which we overlook; in theirs, ſome

circumſtances of bitterneſs may lie concealed from our notice.

But whatever may be their condition, ¿ Can we not find, in our own, ſufficient matter of praiſe ? ¿ Who can ſay, he is not daily a ſubject of divine favours ? Yea, daily loaded with them ?—¿ Shall we be diſſatisfied with a condition, in which we daily experience more mercies than we can expreſs ?—¿ Shall we envy the bleſſings of our neighbours, when our own amount to ſuch a load, as all our gratitude cannot equal ?

When we feel ungodly paſſions working within us, let us commune with our own hearts, and be ſtill. Let us review the benefits which we have received, and meditate on thoſe which we enjoy, and thus learn, in every ſtate, to be content.

4. We ſee, that there is no occaſion for anxiety about future events.

We have daily been loaded with God's mercies, and ſtill we may truſt ourſelves in his hands.

Changes often take place in nations, in families, and in the condition of particular perſons; but theſe changes are under the direction of a Being who never errs. Religion allows us, and prudence directs us, to guard againſt the evils which threaten our perſons, our property, or our friends: But neither religion nor prudence permit us to indulge anxious fears. ¿ Has God ever forſaken us ?—¿ Has he not fed and clothed us by his bounty, guided us by his counſel, and protected us by his power ?—¿ Has he not ſmil-

ed

ed on our labours, and bleſſed the works of our hands?—¿ And why may we not ſtill rely on his care?—¿ Has he not opened to the view of faith and hope a glorious world, in which dwell righteouſneſs, peace and joy?—¿ And ſhall we be ſolicitous about particular events, which may await us here?—¿ What have we to do—we tranſient, itinerant beings—but to ſecure a title to that better world, to purſue the line of our duty here, to leave all events with God, and lay up for ourſelves a treaſure in the heavens? The good man is not afraid of evil tidings: His heart is fixed truſting in the Lord.

5. We have abundant reaſon for ſubmiſſion under the adverſities of life.

As this is a ſtate of probation, afflictions are neceſſary: But while we ſuffer them, we are loaded with benefits. ¿ Who can ſay, he has not received from the hand of God more good than evil—more bleſſings than calamities? We meet with diſappointments; but theſe are often the fruits of our own unreaſonable expectations. Our prudent labours are oftener ſucceeded than blaſted. We have days of pain and ſickneſs: But more numerous are our days of health and quietneſs. We ſuffer the loſs of friends: But we are not left ſolitary; other friends ſurvive. Our ſubſtance may be providentially diminiſhed: But ſtill we have bread to eat, and raiment to put on. If we ſhould experience the ſpoiling of our

earthly goods; yet we have the means of providing for ourſelves in heaven a better and an enduring ſubſtance.

After all this, ¿ Can we ſay, that we have cauſe to complain? The world may fall ſhort of our wiſhes; but heaven will far exceed them.

6. Our ſubject calls upon us to abound in works of goodneſs.

If we are loaded with benefits, ſome of them we ſhould communicate to thoſe who need.

Though all around us ſhare in the divine bounty, all ſhare not alike. Some may want particular bleſſings, which we enjoy; and we may want thoſe which they enjoy. There ought then to be a reciprocation of benefits—an interchange of good offices. We are required to bear one another's burdens, and ſo fulfil the law of Chriſt. The apoſtle inſtructs us, that mutual benevolence ought to introduce among chriſtians a kind of equality; that our abundance ought to afford a ſupply for the want of our brethren; and their abundance, at another time, or in another reſpect, ought to yield a ſupply for our want; according as it is written concerning the manna; He who gathered much, had nothing over, having communicated the overplus to him who had gathered leſs; and he who gathered little, had no lack, having received a ſupply from him who had gathered more.

This diſtribution to the neceſſities of others, is the nobleſt expreſſion of our gratitude to God.

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The apoſtle ſays, "Let us offer to God the ſacrifice of praiſe continually, giving thanks to his name; but to do good and to communicate forget not, for with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed."

END OF THE FORTYSIXTH SERMON.

SERMON XLVII.

The Christian characterized, who has been with Jesus.

A SERMON *after the* COMMUNION.

ACTS iv. 13.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were ignorant and unlearned men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

THE two apostles here named, as they went up to the temple at the hour of prayer, met with a cripple, who, having, from his birth, been unable to walk, was laid at the gate of the temple, to ask alms of the people, who came thither for devotion. Attentive to the design, for which he was placed there, he seems to have let none pass unsolicited. "Seeing Peter and John about to enter into the temple, he asked alms of them. Instead of giving him money, an article in which they did not abound, they exercised their

their charity in a more uſeful way. They ſaid to him; "In the name of Jeſus of Nazareth, riſe up and walk." And immediately he received ſtrength, went with them into the temple, and joined in the praiſes of God.

The publicity and notoriety of the miracle rendered it, at once, a topick of common converſation. "The people were filled with amazement, and ran together greatly wondering." The apoſtles improved the occaſion, to demonſtrate the divine power and authority of Jeſus of Nazareth, who had been rejected as an impoſtor, and crucified as a malefactor; and to exhort the people to repentance, for the remiſſion of ſins in his name. And their preaching, accompanied with ſo notable a miracle, had a mighty effect. Of thoſe who heard the word, thouſands believed, and acknowledged the Saviour.

Alarmed at the miracle and its conſequences, the high prieſt ſummoned a council, called the apoſtles before him, and examined them, by what power, and in what name they had done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghoſt, anſwered, "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Iſrael; if we be this day examined concerning the good deed done to this impotent man, by what means he is made whole: Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Iſrael, that by the name of Jeſus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God hath raiſed from the dead, even by HIM doth this man ſtand before you whole. This is the ſtone, which is ſet at nought by you builders,

which is become the head of the corner; neither is there salvation in any other." The freedom and assurance, with which the apostles spake, surprised the rulers. It is said, "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled." They are called *unlearned*, and *ignorant*, or *private* men, as the word may be rendered; i. e. men of private education. They were not men, who *then* appeared unlearned and ignorant. The freedom with which they spake, the knowledge which they discovered in the holy scriptures, especially in the ancient prophecies, and the force of their reasoning to prove that Jesus was the Christ, convinced the rulers, that they were, at that time, men of superiour abilities and acquirements. But it was matter of admiration, how these men, who had only had a private education, and never had been instructed in the Jewish schools, should discover such an uncommon degree of knowledge and boldness, to speak and argue in defence of their religion. So the Jews, when they heard Jesus teach in the temple, marvelled, saying, "¿ How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?"——"But, it is added, the rulers took knowledge of these men, that they had been with Jesus." This was sufficient to account for their superiour knowledge and boldness.

It is here observable, that though Christ chose for his disciples, men of private education, yet he sent them not forth to preach his gospel, until they

they had been, for ſome time, under his own immediate inſtruction. Paul, whoſe early education had been ſuperiour, was, ſoon after his converſion, employed in the miniſtry. But ſtill he was previouſly inſtructed in the doctrines of the goſpel by Annanias, who was ſent to him for that purpoſe. Even in that day, when uncommon gifts were beſtowed by the immediate power of the Spirit, a preparatory education was ordinarily required to furniſh men for the goſpel miniſtry. Novices were not to be introduced into ſo great and important an office. The apoſtle to the Hebrews intimates, that there muſt be time ſpent in learning the principles of the oracles of God, and in going on from thence to more perfect knowledge, before men are qualified to become teachers of others. How abſurd is it then, in this day, when prophecy has failed, and the ſupernatural gift of knowledge has ceaſed, for the unlearned and ignorant to aſſume, without a previous education, the work of publick inſtruction?

But not to enlarge on this incidental thought; what I would eſpecially notice in the words, is the happy influence of an acquaintance with Chriſt.

The Jewiſh rulers ſaw ſomething in theſe apoſtles, which appeared marvellous, until they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jeſus.

We will conſider, How the expreſſion of *being with Jeſus*, may be applied to others, as well as

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to his immediate disciples: And how they, who have been with him, ought to distinguish themselves.

I. The expression of *being with Jesus* may be applied to many others, as well as to his immediate disciples.

1. It may be applied to all who enjoy the gospel.

Peter and John, and their fellow disciples, were favoured with a personal knowledge of, and admitted to, familiar converse with their divine Lord. Being daily in his company, they could hear his excellent instructions; observe his heavenly life, behold his wonderful works; and take a part in his sublime devotions. Happy disciples! ¿How great was their privilege?——¿But is yours inferiour? You have his gospel. This communicates to you the instructions which they heard—the works which they beheld—the example which they followed—and the devotions in which they joined. In regard therefore to all the purposes of faith, knowledge and virtue, you may be with him, as truely as they were. You think, they had a peculiar advantage in hearing his living voice, and seeing his living manners. And ¿Would not they also say, You have a peculiar advantage in conversing with his written word, and in reviewing, at your pleasure, the things which you have learned? If a living voice will touch the heart more sensibly, yet it is more transient than the written word. This is much better adapted to enrich your memory, and improve

prove your knowledge. What then could be expected of them as disciples of Jesus, more than may be expected of you? You think that men, who had been with Jesus, as they were, should daily live under the influence of his doctrines and in conformity to his example. ¿ And ought not you to do the same? You are as fully taught, as they were, how you ought to walk and to please God; and every motive, which they had, is also proposed to you. If you then, who have thus been with Jesus from your youth, and have ever lived under his instructions, are governed by the interests, and conformed to the manners of this world, ¿ What will you say in your own excuse?

2. There is a still higher sense in which the *true believer* has been with Jesus.

He has received the renewing influence of the spirit of Christ, and experienced the sanctifying power of his gospel. He has not only heard the Saviour's inviting voice, but has enjoyed fellowship with him, and been made a partaker of his grace. The most important intercourse, which the first disciples had with their Lord was of this kind. Barely to behold his works, and receive his instructions, was but a small thing, compared with the efficacious influence of his grace on their hearts. Of this every real believer is a subject; and therefore, in the highest and most eminent sense of the expression, he has been with Jesus. There was a miraculous power of the spirit, designed for the establishment of the gospel, which was peculiar to the apostolick age. But the more

gentle

gentle influence of the Spirit, which aids the efficacy of the gospel on those who hear it, is in a greater or less degree, common to all ages. Christ says, "The words, which I speak, they are spirit and they are life." The Spirit which Christ promised to his disciples, was to "abide with them always." The gospel is called "a ministration of the Spirit." In regard of his Spirit, dwelling in the hearts of believers, Christ promises, that "He will come and make his abode with them."

If then you have received the spirit of Christ, in his renewing and comforting influence, you have, in the most desirable sense of the expression, been with him.—¿ And ought you not to be distinguished from a wicked world? ¿ Ought you not to live in such a manner as will manifest your acquaintance and intimacy with him? ¿ If he has come and made his abode with you, will you not serve him in newness of spirit and purity of life? If you have been called to the fellowship of the Son of God, and to the communion of the Holy Ghost—if you are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, then walk no more according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, but walk in the Spirit, and manifest the life of Christ in your own. For you are debtors to live not after the flesh, but after the Spirit—not according to the course of the world, but according to the pattern of your divine Redeemer.

3. As

3. As true believers have been with Jesus in their renovation by his Spirit; so there are times, when they have special intercourse and communion with him.

They are often with him in their *private devotions*.

He has commanded them to enter into their closet, and pray in secret to their heavenly Father, who will reward them openly. They are careful to obey the command, and they experience the fulfilment of, the promise. When they draw near to God, with a humble sense of their wants and their unworthiness—with a believing view of Christ's power and grace—with earnest desires of the mercies which they need, and with lively hopes of obtaining them through his mediation; then may they be said to have been with him. Such a sensible interview will be accompanied with penitence for sin and resolutions against it—with greater indifference to the world—and with more ardent aspirations of soul after heaven and holiness.

But alas! how often does the christian feel such a deadness on his spirits, such a faintness in his desires, and such a languor in his affections, as scarcely to know, whether he has been with his Saviour, or has only made a formal visit to his closet. He retires without the refreshment, which he sometimes finds, because he has been there without the life, which he sometimes feels. The hypocrite is content with the formality of a visit. The sincere christian laments his languid

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faith, and unanimated devotion. He adopts the language of Job, "O that I knew where I might find him. I would come even to his ſeat; I would order my cauſe before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would anſwer me, and underſtand what he would ſay to me." He examines his heart to find what ſecret iniquity has intercepted the glad beams of his Saviour's love. He calls to mind his ſins, and lays them, in humble confeſſion, before God. He labours to awaken in his ſoul greater life and fervour of devotion. And though, after all, he ſhould not find that ſpirit and affection in duty, which he deſires, ſtill his reſolution is fixed to walk with Chriſt in all holy converſation. In this reſolution chiefly conſiſts the power of godlineſs. The warmth of affection may, even in good chriſtians, be variable. And ſome, perhaps, imagine that religion decays in their ſouls, in proportion as their devout affections cool. But this is not always the caſe. ¿ Do you ſtill cleave to God with purpoſe of heart? ¿ Are your reſolutions againſt every ſin, and for every duty, as firm and ſteady as ever? Then interpret not the languor of your affections, as an indication of the decay of religion; but rather impute it to the infirmities of nature. "The ſpirit is willing, but the fleſh is weak." Lively affections, well balanced, and wiſely directed, are great helps to duty, and contribute much to the facility and pleaſure of practical religion. But a heart, under the calm and rational influence of

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the great doctrines of the gospel, steadily fixed for God, and firmly resolved against every sin, is principally to be regarded.

As true christians are with Jesus in their private devotions, so they are often with him in *social worship.*

He has promised his disciples, "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Christ has instituted social worship, and required his disciples to attend upon it, for their edification in knowledge, purity and love. When they, in regard to his institution, and in obedience to his command, associate in divine worship, they come together in his name. When thus they come together, he is in the midst of them, by the ministration of his word for their instruction, by the influence of his Spirit for their assistance, and by his gracious notice for their acceptance. If when we retire from the place, where he has appointed to meet us, we can, on reflection, find that we have received his word with corresponding purposes and dispositions of soul—that we have felt its humbling and quickening power—that in social prayer our hearts have really joined—that desire has accompanied our petitions; humiliation, our confessions; gratitude, our praises; and charity, our intercessions; then may we say, We have been with Jesus.

Again;

Again: He has appointed his holy ſupper, as a medium of intercourſe with him; and he requires our obſervance of it, that we may remember, and ſhew forth his death. Here he repreſents his body wounded for our tranſgreſſions—our great guilt, which nothing but his blood could expiate—his amazing love in giving himſelf a ſacrifice for us—the full pardon purchaſed by his death—and the neceſſity of repentance and newneſs of life, in order to our obtaining his great ſalvation. When we attend upon this ordinance with ſuch views of Chriſt—with godly ſorrow for our ſins—with love and gratitude to him, who has died for us—with humble reliance on his atonement and interceſſion—and with fixed purpoſes of heart to honour him before men; then may we be ſaid to have been with him.

When Jeſus firſt inſtituted this ordinance, he attended it with his diſciples. But if they had no other views of him, than what his bodily preſence offered to their ſight, they were with him to little purpoſe. The view, which faith gives of him, as a divine teacher and a ſpiritual Saviour, and ſuch deſires and reſolutions, as this view is ſuited to inſpire, are now, and were then, of principal importance in attending on this ſupper.

We have ſeen what it is to have been with Jeſus.

II. We will now conſider, how ſuch as have been with him, ought to diſtinguiſh themſelves.

The rulers of the Jews marvelled at the conduct of the two apoſtles, until they took knowledge

edge of them, that they had been with Jesus. The expression imports, that they, who had been formed by his example, and under his instructions, differed from the men of the world; and discovered such tempers and manners, as were, in some degree, peculiar to themselves.

It was Peter's earnest advice to those who professed their faith in Christ, that they should keep themselves from that untoward generation. It was Paul's exhortation to such, that they should not be conformed to this world, nor walk, as the Gentiles walked; but should prove what was the acceptable will of God. It is said of those, who had felt the transforming power of the gospel, that the Gentiles with whom they had formerly walked, thought it strange, that they ran not with them still to the same excess of riot. Christ signifies to his disciples, that they should do more than others—should be as the salt of the earth—as a city set on a hill—as lights, to guide others in the way of truth.

You may then justly enquire, ¿ In what respects christians ought to be distinguished ?

1. If you have been with Jesus, be watchful against all sin. You have seen him, who suffered death to redeem you from inquity : ¿ How can you continue any longer therein ? You have beheld him wounded for your transgressions, and bruised for your iniquities : Surely you will not dare to wound him again. If he has been crucified for you, you will not crucify him afresh, and put him to open shame; but you will crucify

your vile affections, put on his character, and walk in his ſpirit.

2. If you have been with Chriſt, and trained up under his inſtructions, it may juſtly be expected, that you ſhould excel in religious knowledge.

If his firſt diſciples had come forth from under his tuition, as ignorant of his religion, as when he called them, ¿ Who would not have condemned their ſtupidity ? You enjoy his goſpel, which is able to make you wiſe unto ſalvation, and furniſh you for every good work. If when, for the time, you might have been teachers of others, you have ſtill need to be taught what are the firſt principles of the oracles of God, you are criminally dull of hearing.

3. If you have been with Jeſus, then ſhew yourſelves to be like him.

Learn of him to be meek and lowly, patient and contented, pious and heavenly. If the diſciples, who lived with him, and were daily in his company, had caught nothing of his temper and manners, they would have diſcovered a ſtubborn and intractable mind. You have ſeen his amiable example drawn in his goſpel—you have heard it deſcribed in the publick diſpenſation of his word —you have beheld him exhibited in the ordinance of the ſupper : ¿ And have you not learned to be like him ?—¿ Are you ſtill like the men of the world—vain and haughty, covetous and ambitious, paſſionate and contentious ?—¿ Who would think, that you had been with Jeſus ? He was

meek

meek and gentle, peaceable and condeſcending, contented in poverty, and patient in adverſity.

4. Set your affections on things in heaven, for Jeſus is there.

He came to deliver you from this evil world. He ſubmitted to poverty, to teach you the vanity of worldly wealth and honour. He died and roſe again to point your thoughts, and draw your affections toward a ſuperiour world.

If you have been converſant with him, it may be expected, that you ſhould be dead to this world, and that your converſation ſhould be in heaven. Your intereſt is there; let your hearts be there alſo. The apoſtle ſays to the Coloſſians; "You, being dead in your ſins, God hath quickened with Chriſt; and, being baptiſed into his death, ye are riſen with him by the faith of the operation of God. If ye then be riſen with Chriſt, ſeek the things which are above, where Chriſt ſitteth on the right hand of God."

5. It is obſerved of theſe apoſtles, that they diſcovered a marvellous zeal and fortitude in the cauſe of Chriſt. This was the effect of their acquaintance with him.

The ſpirit of his religion is a ſpirit of power and of a ſound mind. It inſpires with reſolution and courage in times of oppoſition and danger. If we have ſeen Chriſt's example—his zeal for God—his contempt of the world—his perſeverance in his work: If we have learned his doctrines, heard his promiſes and contemplated the glorious rewards which he has prepared for the

faithful; we may be ſtrong in the power of his might. If then we faint in the day of adverſity, yield to temptations, or diſſemble our religion in the preſence of ſcoffers, we act as thoſe, who have never been with Jeſus.

6. The religion of Jeſus breathes a ſpirit of love.

A pattern of the moſt exalted benevolence he himſelf has exhibited; and the ſame benevolence he has inculcated on his diſciples. He has taught them to love one another—to love enemies—to love all men. It may then be expected of thoſe, who are formed under his example and inſtructions, that "they ſhould put away all bitterneſs, wrath, malice, envy, clamour and evil ſpeaking; and put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindneſs, meekneſs and long ſuffering, forgiving one another, as Chriſt forgiveth them; and that, above all things, they put on charity, which is the bond of perfectneſs."—"By this," ſays our Lord, "ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love another." If then we have nothing of his love, ¿ Shall we ſay, we have been with him? No: We have not ſeen him, nor known him; or we have companied with him in vain.

Let us ſeriouſly apply theſe thoughts.

If we find not in ourſelves the temper which was in Chriſt, let us humbly lament our neglect of the privileges which we enjoy, and more wiſely improve them in future.

We ſee, when we may be ſaid to make a proper uſe of ordinances, and to attend upon them acceptably.

ceptably. It is when we have ſo been with Chriſt, as to learn his religion, and become conformed to it.

We have, this day, been near to Chriſt in his houſe, and at his table: Let us not walk according to the courſe of the world, but according to the pattern and precepts of our divine maſter. Let us, who have been ſo highly honoured of God, as to be called to the fellowſhip of his Son, depart from all iniquity, be zealous of good works, live above the world, and maintain a humble, contented, benevolent and peaceable ſpirit; thus men will be conſtrained to confeſs, that Jeſus is among us of a truth.

THE END OF THE FORTYSEVENTH SERMON.

SERMON XLVIII.

The Impotent Man at the Pool of Bethesda.

JOHN v. 1——9.

After this there was a feaſt of the Jews, and Jeſus went up to Jeruſalem. Now there is at Jeruſalem, by the ſheepmarket, a pool, which is called, in the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having five porches. In theſe lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water: For an angel went down at a certain ſeaſon into the pool, and troubled the water. Whoſoever then, firſt after the troubling of the water, ſtepped in, was made whole of whatſoever diſeaſe he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jeſus ſaw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that caſe, he ſaid unto him, ¿ Wilt thou be made whole ? The impotent man anſwered him ; Sir,

Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another ſteppeth in before me. Jeſus ſaith unto him, Ariſe, take up thy bed and walk. And immediately he was made whole, and took up his bed and walked. And on the ſame day was the ſabbath.

THE feaſt here mentioned, on account of which Jeſus went up to Jeruſalem, was probably the paſſover; for at this, all the males were required to appear before God in the temple.

Though the Jewiſh church, in that day, had greatly degenerated from its ancient purity, and in many things had departed from the divine inſtitutions, yet Chriſt did not withdraw from her communion; but he conſtantly attended with her on the feſtivals appointed by the law.

The Evangeliſt ſays, "Now at Jeruſalem, by the ſheepmarket," or ſheepgate, as it is elſewhere called, "there is a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches." The word rendered a *pool*, properly ſignifies a *bath*, or a place for *ſwimming*. It was juſt within the walls of the city, near one of the principal gates; and it had ſeveral porches, or covered walks, for the convenience of thoſe, who came thither to bathe themſelves.

"At a certain ſeaſon," it is ſaid, "an angel went down into the pool and troubled the water," or put it in motion; "whoſoever then firſt after

the troubling of the water, ſtepped in, was made whole of whatſoever diſeaſe he had."

Some have conjectured, that the healing virtue of this water was derived from the entrails of the beaſts, ſlain for ſacrifice, which, they ſuppoſe, were thrown into it; and that the angel, who ſtirred the water, was only a meſſenger, or officer, ſent at certain times to put it in motion. But it ſeems altogether incredible, that water, from any natural cauſe, ſhould cure *all ſorts* of diſeaſes —that its healing virtue ſhould operate only at *particular ſeaſons*—that it ſhould help *only* the perſon who *firſt ſtepped* in—or that ſuch multitudes ſhould wait for a certain officer to come and ſtir the water; and ſhould not rather do it themſelves, or call on ſome perſon to do it for them. Nor does it appear probable, that the ſacrifices were waſhed in this pool, as there was in the temple a laver for that purpoſe. It is manifeſt, therefore, that the efficacy of this water was miraculous.

This pool ſeems to have been the ſame which is elſewhere called the pool of *Shiloah*, or *Siloam*, whither Jeſus ſent the blind man to waſh, after he had anointed his eyes with clay.

We find ſome alluſions to it in the Old Teſtament.

The diſobedience of the Jews to the mild government of the Prince of Peace, is, in the prophet, expreſſed by "their refuſing the waters of *Shiloah*, which go ſoftly." The faith of ſuch as received the goſpel is foretold by a ſimilar alluſion. "With joy ſhall they draw water out of the *wells*

of

of *ſalvation*," or the fountains of health. The word *Shiloah*, which ſignifies *one who is ſent*, is a name by which the Meſſiah is called, in prophecy, particularly in that of Jacob, "The ſceptre ſhall not depart from Judah—until Shiloah come." As theſe waters were typical of Chriſt, and of the bleſſings which flow from him, God might communicate to them this healing virtue, to prepare the Jews for the reception of the true *Shiloah*, and to lead them unto that fountain, which he ſhould open for uncleanneſs.

The hiſtorian tells us, that, in the porticoes of this pool, "lay a great multitude of impotent folk, blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water."

What pains men will take, even on the moſt doubtful proſpect, for the cure of their *bodily* diſeaſes; and yet under their ſpiritual maladies, how negligent are they to ſeek relief, though they enjoy the moſt efficacious means! Multitudes came and lay at the pool to be healed of their blindneſs, lameneſs and other infirmities; but of thoſe, whoſe ſouls were periſhing under guilt, how few applied to the Divine Phyſician! They who lay at theſe ſalutary waters, came to them with great ſincerity—with real deſires to be healed. This was their ſole intention. There was not a diſſembler among them. But of thoſe, who went to hear the Heavenly Preacher, many were influenced by the moſt unworthy motives. Their aim was not, to learn their duty by his inſtructions, to receive conviction from his reproofs, or

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to obtain ſalvation through his righteouſneſs; but rather to eat of his loaves, or to enſnare him in his talk, or to gratify their vain curioſity.

Look into your own hearts—¿ Do you find no ſuch hypocriſy, or inconſiſtency there? If you are ſick, you apply to the phyſician with an unfeigned deſire of health; and his preſcriptions you ſtrictly obſerve. ¿ Is there the ſame ſincerity in your prayers; and the ſame attention and obedience in hearing the word of ſalvation? ¿ Are your confeſſions of ſin accompanied with penitence of heart, your petitions animated with inward deſires, and your thankſgivings enlivened with real ſentiments of gratitude?—¿ Do you hear the divine word, with a concern to underſtand it, with honeſty to apply it, and with a reſolution to be governed by it? If not; ¿ To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices to God? He will not delight in them.

Great numbers of ſick people were waiting at this pool, though it was only *at a certain ſeaſon*, that any could receive a cure. But the fountain of divine grace is always open and eaſy of acceſs. Thence may you draw water for your uſe in every time of need. They, with painful anxiety, waited for the diſtant, uncertain opportunity of applying the means of health. ¿ Will you, with unfeeling indifference, neglect the preſent, inviting, happy ſeaſon for ſecuring eternal life?

They had but a doubtful proſpect of ſucceſs; for only the firſt who ſtepped into the water, would be made whole: Yet, when ſo great an

object,

object, as their health, was depending, they thought it their wisdom to watch, seek and strive. How much more in a case of such infinite importance as yours. It is not your bodily health, or your mortal life, but your soul, which is now in danger. ¿ What would you be profited, if you should gain the world, and lose your soul? This is not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ. If you despise and trample on his blood, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. ¿ When your soul is lost, what will you give in exchange for it?—Its redemption will cease forever. If there was only one in a multitude, who could be saved, you would have as much encouragement, as the people at Bethesda. But your hope stands on much better ground. This is the invitation of the gospel. "Ho, every one who thirsteth, come to the water."—"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

In their case, success depended on being foremost. If, while one was going to the water, another stepped in before him, his labour was lost. But from this forwardness in others you have nothing to fear. You may suffer by your own negligence, but you will not be supplanted by their diligence. You may be too indolent; but they will not be too active. Their zeal will throw no obstruction in your way; it will rather assist your exertions, and facilitate your success. The fountain of divine grace, how many soever have washed in it, is still open and free; it is still pure

and

and ſalutary. Go, as ſoon, and in as large a throng as you pleaſe. Go; there is room for you all—and room now. You need not wait for one another. Go, hand in hand; aid and encourage each other along. When the maſter ſent forth his ſervant into the ſtreet to call into his houſe the poor, maimed, halt and blind; the ſervant, having done as he was commanded, returned, and ſaid, "Yet there is room." "Then ſaid his Lord, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my houſe may be filled."

Among the people, which lay in the porches of Bethesda, there was one, whoſe caſe was peculiarly diſtreſſing. For thirty and eight years he had been afflicted with an obſtinate infirmity. He was become intirely helpleſs. For ſome time paſt he had lain at the pool; but he could receive no benefit; for, poor man, he had no friend to aſſiſt him in the critical moment. While he was crawling toward the water, another ſtepped down before him. Phyſicians he had, doubtleſs, tried in vain. The pool was the laſt reſort. Here, though often diſappointed, ſtill he waited with anxious wiſhes, but drooping hopes. Great were his diſcouragements: And great his patience.

Ye who feel your ſpiritual wants and infirmities, go, repair to God, and truſt in his mercy. You are under no ſuch diſcouragements. Watch at his gates; wait at the poſts of his doors; continue inſtant in prayer. He has not ſaid to you, Seek ye me in vain. If you find not immediate

ſucceſs,

ſucceſs, ſtill hope and quietly wait for his ſalvation. You have need of patience, that after you have done his will, you may receive the promiſes. It is by faith and patience that you will inherit them. Let the deſire of your ſouls be unto God, and to the remembrance of his name. With your ſouls deſire him in the night, and with your ſpirit within you ſeek him early. He will keep thoſe in peace, whoſe minds are ſtayed on him.

The advantage of conſtancy and fervency in prayer our Saviour has illuſtrated in two parables: The one concerning a man, who, though illiberal in his diſpoſition, yet, by the importunity of a friend, was perſuaded to riſe at midnight and relieve his urgent neceſſities: The other concerning a judge, who, though he had not one principle of piety or juſtice in his heart, yet, by the repeated ſolicitations of a poor widow, was moved to redreſs the wrongs which ſhe ſuffered. Hence we are taught to conclude, that a God of infinite goodneſs and power will much more hear and anſwer his own elect, who cry to him day and night, though he ſhould ſeem for a time to delay.

An example of perſeverance under diſcouragements we have in the ſtory of Bartimeus. This poor, blind man ſat by the wayſide, aſking alms of travellers. Hearing a company paſs along, and being informed that Jeſus was among them, he cried, ſaying, "Jeſus, have mercy on me." The Saviour went on his way, and ſeemed

ed not to hear him. Some of the company rebuked the clamorous beggar, and charged him to hold his peace. But he cried the more a great deal; "Thou ſon of David, have mercy on me." Then Jeſus ſtood and called him; attended to his caſe, and granted him relief.

Another example we have in the woman of Canaan. She cried to Jeſus, ſaying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord; my daughter is grievouſly vexed with a devil." But he anſwered her not a word. The diſciples interceded in her behalf. "Send her away;" grant her requeſt and diſmiſs her; "for ſhe crieth after us;" cries with an earneſtneſs that ſpeaks diſtreſs. But he ſaid, "I am not ſent, but to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael." To the Jews I am firſt ſent: ¿ Why do you aſk me to ſhew mercy to that gentile? One would have expected, the poor woman ſhould now withdraw her petition. But ſhe renewed it with greater importunity. She came and worſhipped him, ſaying, "Lord, help me." Jeſus then ſeemed to give her little leſs than a peremptory denial. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and caſt it to dogs." Chriſt here alludes to the invidious diſtinction which the Jews made between themſelves and the Gentiles; a diſtinction, which this woman, being converſant among the Jews, muſt often have heard. She humbly anſwers; "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs, which fall from their maſters' table." She confeſſes her unworthineſs, and begs an inferiour place among the children,

children, to eat the crumbs, which they throw away. Jesus now says, "O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt."

We may observe farther, how attentive these infirm people were to the particular seasons, which favoured their recovery. It is said, "They *waited* for the moving of the water." The impotent man says, "While I am going, another stepeth in before me." All were on the watch for the friendly moment; and all on the strife, who first should seize it.

Be ye, my friends, as attentive to the interest of your souls, as they were to the health of their bodies. "Behold, now is the accepted time: Behold, now is the day of salvation."

Life is the only season of probation. There is no work in the grave. The events of futurity are hidden from mortal sight. None knows what a day may bring forth. Know, in this your day, the things which belong to your peace.

There are some seasons peculiarly favourable to you—seasons when the spirit of grace strives with you, admonishes you of danger, and urges your escape—seasons when your hearts are awakened to an apprehension of the judgment to come, and affected with the vast concerns of religion. Watch these motions, as the impotent people watched the motion of the waters; and embrace them with equal avidity. Neglect not present advantages under pretence of waiting for future excitations. Improve the former now; obey the latter whenever they occur.—"Seek the

Lord

Lord, while he may be found; call upon him, while he is near.

"When Jesus saw the impotent man lie" in his helpless condition, "and knew that he had now been a long time in that case, he said unto him, ¿ Wilt thou be made whole ?"

The length and greatness of this man's calamity, and the peculiar imbecility of his state, seem to have been the reasons, why Jesus made choice of him, as the subject on whom to display his healing power; while the rest were left under their infirmities.

The evangelists tell us, that "Christ healed all who came to him." They who made application to him in their own behalf, or in behalf of their friends, received the favour, which they asked. But the sick at Bethesda never applied to him at all. They were looking for relief from another quarter. They were not, therefore, such persons, as those, to whom he usually extended his healing mercy. Among them, however, there was one, whom he singled out from the multitude, and favoured with unsolicited health.

Analogous to this is the method of his grace in the salvation of sinners. Them who come to him he will in no wise cast out. Them who apply to him, with humble and penitent hearts, he will not reject. To obtain that grace which is necessary to repentance, awakened sinners must attend on the instituted means of religion. And it is usually, in an attendance on these means, that they are first brought to serious consideration.

Particular

Particular inſtances, no doubt there are, in which God is found of them who ſought him not. He ſometimes, by his ſpecial providence, or powerful grace, arreſts ſinners, when they are in full purſuit of their guilty deſigns, and quite out of the way of ordinary means; as Jeſus ſhewed mercy to the impotent man, who was looking for help only from the pool. But this is not God's ordinary method. And for ſinners to neglect the uſe of means, becauſe, now and then, one has been ſuddenly and ſurpriſingly awakened to conviction and repentance, is as abſurd, as it would have been for the ſick people in Jeruſalem to expect a cure from Jeſus without applying to him, becauſe one impotent man at Bethesda had received this favour. In healing thoſe who came to him, he acted as a faithful Saviour. In chooſing this man from a number, he acted as a wiſe ſovereign. He had mercy on whom he would have mercy. The man who was healed, had reaſon to admire this diſtinguiſhing goodneſs. They who were left under their infirmities had no cauſe to complain; for, though they ſaw the power of Chriſt in this remarkable inſtance, yet it does not appear, that they ever applied to him. This is his complaint of the unbelieving Jews; and this will be the condemnation of ſinners under the goſpel; "They would not come to him, that they might have life."

Chriſt ſays to the impotent man, "¿ Wilt thou be made whole?" The man now opens his ſorrowful caſe.—"Sir, I have no man, when the wa-

ter is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am going, another ſteppeth down before me."

Jeſus puts the queſtion, that the man, in the preſence of the multitude, might declare the greatneſs and inveteracy of his diſorder. Thus the miracle to be performed would become more conſpicuous, and others, from his goodneſs and power, would be encouraged to ſeek relief. The mercy ſhewn to this poor man, was mercy offered to all in diſtreſs. If the impotent people, who ſaw the miracle, would not apply to the Saviour, well might they be left under the burden of their diſeaſes.

It is obſervable, that, though Jeſus made the firſt motion to the unhappy patient, yet he did not actually heal him, till the man had humbly expreſſed his deſire of health, and his inability to obtain it. In this manner, the Saviour uſually diſpenſes his ſpiritual benefits. "Behold," ſays he, "I ſtand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and ſup with him, and he with me." To thoſe who have not ſought him, he applies himſelf in a way of exhortation and addreſs: He calls them by his word, admoniſhes them by his providence, and awakens them by his ſpirit. Theſe kind, influential viſits are granted previouſly to any promiſing and towardly diſpoſitions in them. But before he actually beſtows on them his ſaving mercy, they muſt ſee their guilt, feel their impotence, and repair to him as the only Saviour.

They

They who are whole need not the phyſician; and they who think themſelves to be whole, will not ſeek to the phyſician; but they who are ſick. There are ſome, "who ſay, they are rich and increaſed with goods and have need of nothing; and know not, that they are wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Theſe deſpiſe the counſel of Chriſt, to "buy of him gold tried in the fire, that they may be rich; and white raiment, that they may be clothed, and to anoint their eyes with eyeſalve, that they may ſee." The invitations and offers of the goſpel, which are made to all indiſcriminately, are often addreſſed, in a very particular manner, to the hungry and thirſty, the weary and heavy laden.

Jeſus ſays to the man, "Ariſe, take up thy bed and walk."—"And immediately he was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked." This order was given, that, by the perfection and ſuddenneſs of the cure, the miracle might be rendered indubitable. It is added, "The ſame day was the ſabbath." When the people, who on this day reſted from their labours, ſhould reprove the man for carrying his bed, he would not fail to relate the mercy which he had experienced, and thus make it known to many beſides the immediate ſpectators.

Chriſt's miracles in healing the ſick, were deſigned to convince men of his heavenly miſſion, divine authority and ſaving power. And works of goodneſs, in particular inſtances, were acts of general benevolence. By theſe, as well as by the

invitations and promiſes of his goſpel, let all be encouraged to repair to him for relief in every diſtreſs, for ſuccour in every temptation, and for deliverance from the wrath to come. To him let them commit their eternal intereſt, for he is able to ſave to the uttermoſt, and to keep that which is committed to him againſt the great day.

END OF THE FORTYEIGHTH SERMON.

SERMON

SERMON XLIX.

The awakened Jailor instructed in the way to Salvation.

ACTS xvi. 29, 30, 31.

Then he called for a light and ſprang in, and came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and ſaid, Sirs, ¿ What muſt I do to be ſaved? And they ſaid, Believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and thou ſhalt be ſaved.———

THESE two Apoſtles were ſent to preach the goſpel in Philippi, a conſiderable city in Macedonia, which was inhabited chiefly by Romans, and is therefore called a *colony*.

Their doctrine ſoon gained ſuch credit, that the ſuperſtitions of paganiſm yielded before it. Some principal men, who had long made gain from the ignorance and credulity of the common people, by employing ſervants to tell them ſtrange

things for money, alarmed at the mighty change effected by the preaching of the Apoſtles, ſeized them, brought them before the magiſtrates, accuſed them of making dangerous innovations, and procured them to be impriſoned. The jailor, having received a ſpecial command to keep them ſafely, thruſt them into the inmoſt apartment of the priſon, and locked their feet faſt in the ſtocks.

At midnight, while theſe holy priſoners ſang praiſes to God, there was a violent earthquake, which rocked the foundations of the priſon, burſt open the doors, and looſed every priſoner from his bands.

The jailor, ſuddenly awakened, ſaw the doors ſtanding open; and, concluding that the priſoners had fled, he drew his ſword, and would have killed himſelf, to prevent the infamous puniſhment, which he apprehended. Paul, though it was now midnight, and he was in the inner priſon, and the jailor without, yet perceiving his horrid deſign, called to him, and ſaid, "Do thyſelf no harm, for we are all here." The jailor now fully convinced, that theſe men were the ſervants of God, who taught the way of ſalvation for guilty mortals, "called for a light, ſprang in, came trembling, and fell down before the Apoſtles, aud ſaid, Sirs, ¿ What muſt I do to be ſaved?" To this important enquiry they gave a ſummary but pertinent anſwer, "Believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and thou ſhalt be ſaved."

The manner in which the jailor made his enquiry—the enquiry itſelf—and the anſwer return-

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ed to it, ſhall be the ſubjects of our preſent meditations.

I. The *manner* in which the jailor made his enquiry deſerves our attention.

He muſt be ſuppoſed, previous to this, to have had a general acquaintance with the leading truths of natural religion, ſuch as the exiſtence and government of a Deity, the immortality of the ſoul, and a future ſtate of retribution; for, without a belief of theſe truths, there would have been no room for his enquiry. Nor can we think, that he was altogether a ſtranger to the goſpel. The apoſtles, before their impriſonment, had preached, for ſome time, and with much ſucceſs, in this city; and he had doubtleſs heard and learnt their doctrine, in its general deſign, though he had not yet embraced it. But what had juſt now taken place, rouſed him from his inattention, and impreſſed his mind with a ſtrong conviction, that theſe men were teachers ſent from God. And to them, in this important character, he applied for inſtruction in the things, which concerned his ſalvation.

And he applied to them *in haſte*. He called for a light and *ſprang* into the priſon where they were.

With the careleſs part of mankind the great enquiry is, "¿ Who will ſhew us any worldly good? To them religious inſtructions and counſels are adminiſtered with little ſucceſs. But the ſinner, impreſſed with a conviction of his guilt, and awakened to a ſenſe of his danger, views the

ſalvation of his ſoul, as the one thing needful. Condemning his paſt ſtupidity, he reſolves to ſeek firſt the kingdom of God. This is his great enquiry, "¿ What muſt I do to be ſaved ?"—His ears are open to the anſwer—he receives it with meekneſs, and applies it to practice.

The jailor came to the apoſtles *trembling*.

A conviction of ſin, a ſenſe of danger, and a perſuaſion that theſe men were the ſervants of God, ruſhed with ſuch power into his mind, that his whole frame was thrown into an unuſual perturbation. Paul's converſion was preceded with a ſimilar circumſtance. When a light from the ſky blazed around him, and a voice from heaven demanded the reaſon, and warned him of the danger of his conduct in perſecuting the church, he, trembling and aſtoniſhed, ſaid, "Lord, ¿ What wilt thou have me to do ?"

Conviction, in different ſinners, is attended with different degrees of terror. It does not produce, in every one, ſuch bodily agitation, as it produced in Paul and the jailor. This was, in their caſe, principally owing to the extraordinary and ſurpriſing nature of the means by which they were brought to their new views and ſentiments. But, in all ſinners, conviction is attended with the ſame ſtate of mind, as it was in them ; a ſtate of ſerious ſolicitude and fear.

The awakened ſinner trembles within himſelf, to think what he has been doing—how he has rebelled againſt God, and inſulted his ſupreme authority—how he has involved his ſoul in guilt,

which

which the blood of ſacrifices cannot expiate ; and in pollutions, which ſoap and nitre cannot waſh away. He is amazed at his paſt ſtupidity. There is nothing, except it be the mercy and patience of God, which more aſtoniſhes him, than that unaccountable ſecurity and indifference, with which, from year to year, he has proceeded in a courſe of ſin, contrary to the light of reaſon, the rebukes of Providence, and the warnings of ſcripture. He wonders how it could be, that he ſhould behold death deſtroying around him, and even within his walls—ſhould ſee, on the one hand, a humble chriſtian expire with calm and cheerful hopes; and, on the other, an impenitent ſinner driven away in the terrors of conſcious guilt; and yet never bring home the admonition, nor realize the different ends of the righteous and the wicked.

He trembles at his preſent danger ; a danger, which till now, he never felt. He views himſelf as one ſtanding on a precipice, while the ocean of divine wrath rolls beneath. He ſhudders, when he thinks, how long he has ſlept in this awful ſituation, and dreamed of ſafety.

He is aſtoniſhed at the mercy which has made proviſion for guilty men—at the patience which has waited on him ſo long—and at the grace which has interpoſed to awaken him, and ſtill indulges to him an opportunity of repentance.

He trembles to reflect, how many have been cut off before him, in a ſtate of guilt and impenitence ; ſome of them ſuddenly, and without ſpecial warning ; and how juſtly this might have been

been his own ſad caſe. He admires the goodneſs which has made him to differ. One thing which affected the jailor, was his marvellous preſervation at a critical moment. He had pointed the ſword to his own boſom, God's mercy arreſted the ſtroke. Every awakened ſinner ſees, that he has deſtroyed himſelf, but in God is his help.

It is, with this trembling ſenſe of ſin and danger, and with trembling hopes of mercy, that he now makes the enquiry, what God will have him to do.

The jailor *fell down before the Apoſtles.*

Proſtration was ſometimes uſed as a token of religious adoration. But the jailor was too well acquainted with theſe men to think them entitled to divine honour. And if *they* had underſtood the action as thus intended, they, who always diſclaimed all tokens of religious reverence, would have told him, as Peter did Cornelius, and as Paul and Barnabas did the Lycaonians in the like caſe, "We alſo are men." This action was therefore only a token of his reſpect to them, as teachers ſent from God, and an expreſſion of his humble diſpoſition to receive and obey their heavenly inſtructions. With the ſame meek and teachable ſpirit ſhould every man enquire after the way of ſalvation. "Lay apart all filthineſs," ſays the Apoſtle, "and all ſuperfluity of naughtineſs, and receive with meekneſs the engrafted word, which is able to ſave your ſouls. And be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your ownſelves."

We

We proceed to conſider,

II. The *matter* of the jailor's enquiry; "¿What muſt I do to be ſaved?"

His queſtion implies an apprehenſion, that ſomething was to be done by him to obtain the ſalvation, which the Apoſtles preached: Nor did they rebuke his queſtion as improper; but returned an immediate anſwer, directing him, "to believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt." And then "they ſpake to him the word of the Lord," that he might know what he was to believe, and on what ground his faith was to reſt.

From his queſtion, and their manner of treating it, we learn, that ſomething is to be done by the ſinner, in order to his being ſaved.

But yet we are told, that men are ſaved by grace; and not of themſelves—by the mercy of God; and not by works of righteouſneſs, which they have done.

There is then a ſenſe in which their doings have no influence; and yet a ſenſe in which they are of great importance in the affair of ſalvation.

It is neceſſary to ſtate this matter clearly.

In the firſt place: If we conſider ſalvation in reference to the *ſource* and *origin* of that divine ſcheme, on which it becomes obtainable, it is ſo abſolutely and entirely of grace, as to exclude the influence of every thing elſe. No foreſeen doings of ours could have any hand in moving or perſuading God to contrive and propoſe a way, in which we might be ſaved; but the plan originated wholly with himſelf. His wiſdom contrived

contrived it, and his benevolence adopted it. We had no more hand in it, than we had in originating our own exiſtence. In this view, the grace of God is the primary, moving cauſe of ſalvation, and nothing elſe is joined with it. The appointment of a Saviour to carry on this plan, was the effect of that grace, by which God is inclined to ſave ſinners. The atonement of Jeſus Chriſt was the conſequence, not the cauſe, of God's mercy to our ſinful race. "He ſo *loved* the world, as to give his only begotten ſon, that whoſoever believeth on him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life." No works of ours, therefore, are to be performed under a notion of inclining God to be merciful; for he is merciful in his own nature.

Secondly. The *meritorious cauſe* and *moral reaſon*, why ſalvation is actually offered to, and beſtowed upon ſinful men, is the atonement of Jeſus Chriſt, and this alone. "God has ſet forth his Son a propitiation, to declare his righteouſneſs for the forgiveneſs of ſin, that he might be juſt, and the juſtifier of them who believe." And this propitiation, not the worthineſs of men, is that, for the ſake of which pardon and eternal life are granted. Sinners, therefore, muſt do nothing with a view to *merit* ſalvation, to render themſelves *worthy* of it, or to lay God's *juſtice* under an obligation to beſtow it on them; "for other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, even the righteouſneſs of Jeſus Chriſt."

But then, thirdly, the *character*, or *qualification*, to which the promiſe of ſalvation is limited in

the

the gospel, is something inherent in the subjects of it; and therefore something is to be done by sinners in order to obtain this character, or qualification. Though salvation is, through the grace of God, offered indiscriminately to all; and the righteousness of Jesus Christ, by the virtue of which it is purchased, is sufficiently meritorious for all; yet the actual bestowment of it is confined to persons of a particular description; namely, to them who repent and believe. All impenitent, unbelieving sinners, dying in this character, are, by the gospel, expressly excluded from salvation; and will finally receive no more benefit from the grace of God, and the redemption of Christ, than if grace had never been revealed, or a Saviour had never been provided. Those on whom this blessing will ultimately be conferred are only such as possess that faith, which implies a holy temper, and operates to a holy life. What therefore sinners have to do, in reference to their salvation, respects only their obtaining that faith, to which salvation is promised. And, in this view, their doings are of great importance.

It is God, who has proposed to us the *object*, and given to us the *means* of faith. That word, by the hearing of which faith comes, is the word of God. It is his *Spirit* also, which opens the heart to attend to, and receive the things which are spoken. Faith, therefore, is his gift. But then "we receive the Spirit in the hearing of the word;" not in the neglect of it. When the Apostles directed the jailor to believe in Jesus Christ,

Chriſt, they, knowing that faith came by hearing, "ſpake the word of the Lord to him, and to all who were in his houſe." If it was neceſſary that they ſhould ſpeak the word to him, it was equally neceſſary that he ſhould hear it.

So when Paul enquired, "Lord, ¿ What wilt thou have me to do? The Lord anſwered, "Go into the city, and it ſhall be told thee, what thou muſt do." Paul obeyed; and Ananias was ſent to inſtruct him, and to baptiſe him for the remiſſion of ſins.

Cornelius, the Roman centurion, was commanded, by a heavenly meſſenger, to ſend for the Apoſtle Peter, "who would tell him words, by which he and his houſe ſhould be ſaved." He obeyed the command, ſent for the Apoſtle, and called together his friends to hear the words which ſhould be ſpoken. Peter opened to them the goſpel plan of ſalvation; and, "while he ſpake, the Holy Ghoſt fell on all them who heard the word." Thus "God gave to them repentance unto life."

But this leads us to conſider,

III. The *anſwer* which the Apoſtles returned to the jailor's enquiry. "Believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and thou ſhalt be ſaved."

He already believed, that there was one God, the ruler and judge of the world, to whom he was accountable for his conduct. Otherwiſe he would have felt no occaſion for the enquiry. The Apoſtles, therefore, do not inſtruct him in the great principles of natural religion, as they ever did

did thoſe, whom they found ignorant of them; but they pointed out to him a new object of faith, even the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who was ordained of God to be the Saviour of men. "They ſpoke to him the word of the Lord." They opened the plan, and ſtated the terms of ſalvation, and urged his compliance.

As Jeſus Chriſt was ſent of God to declare divine truths to men, and to execute the ſcheme of redemption, which divine wiſdom had contrived, ſo he is propoſed as the immediate object of faith. "We *by him* do believe in God."

Faith in Chriſt implies a rational aſſent to this truth, that he is a teacher and Saviour ordained of God for men; and conſequently a belief of all that he has commanded and taught. Thus faith is often deſcribed in the goſpel. This was the faith of the diſciples.—"We believe, and are ſure, that thou art the Chriſt, the Son of the living God." This was Martha's faith.—"Lord, I believe that thou art the Chriſt, the Son of God, who ſhould come into the world." This was the faith of the Ethiopian officer.—"I believe that Chriſt is the Son of God." Faith is ſometimes expreſſed by different, but equivalent phraſes; as a belief that "God raiſed Jeſus from the dead"—"that God ſent him into the world."—"that he is a teacher come from God."

This aſſent muſt be the reſult of rational conviction. We are no more to believe without evidence, than to diſbelieve againſt evidence. The latter is obſtinacy; the former is raſhneſs.

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The chriſtian muſt be ready to give to every one a *reaſon* of the hope which is in him. The miracles of Chriſt were performed in the preſence of his diſciples, "that they might believe in him, and that believing they might have life through his name." When he had given Thomas full proof of his reſurrection, he ſaid to him, "Be not faithleſs, but believing."

Now if we believe, on good evidence, that Jeſus is the Son of God, and a teacher ſent by him, we muſt believe all his doctrines and precepts, promiſes and threatenings, and whatſoever he has taught either by his own mouth, or the mouth of his Apoſtles; for, being a divine teacher, he would only bear witneſs to the truth; and he would not employ his divine power in ſupporting the credit of his apoſtles, if they had deviated from his inſtructions. When, therefore, Paul and Silas required the jailor to believe in Chriſt, they required him to believe the whole compaſs of the chriſtian revelation, as far as it had been opened to him, and to receive ſuch additional inſtructions as ſhould, on the ſame authority, be afterward communicated.

But then the faith, to which the promiſe of ſalvation is annexed, is not a cold aſſent of the mind to the general truth of the goſpel, and to the particular doctrines contained in it; but ſuch a belief as includes correſpondent exerciſes and motions of heart. It is believing with the heart, and receiving the love of the truth. The word of

God

God is said effectually to work in them who believe."

Our belief of Christ's divine authority must be accompanied with reverence and submission. Our belief of his holy and perfect character must be attended with love and delight. Our belief of the great things which he has done and suffered for us, must operate in a way of gratitude and joy. Our belief of his meritorious atonement and prevalent intercession must lead us to trust in God through him, and to do all things in his name. Our belief of his sinless and amiable example must induce us to walk as he walked. So that faith, taken in its just latitude and extent, is nothing less than a subjection of soul to the whole gospel of Christ. It is an unreserved dedication of ourselves to his service, and a humble reliance on him for righteousness and strength.

If any now enquire, what they must do to be saved, here is the answer—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved."

You will say, you believe the gospel to be true. Very well; but if you believe it to be true, see that your hearts and lives are conformed to it; and that you act under its influence. You believe that Jesus is the Christ, ¿ But have you seen your own sinfulness, the justice of the law which condemns you, and your incapacity to rescue yourselves from its awful sentence?—¿ Is Christ precious to you?—¿ Have you committed your souls to him to be sanctified by his spirit, and saved by his righteousness?—¿ Have you chosen his

ſervice, and do you walk in imitation of his life, and in reliance on his grace? By ſuch enquiries judge, whether you have believed to the ſaving, or only to the deceiving of your ſouls.

Whatever exerciſes of mind you have felt—whatever duties you have done—whatever means you have attended; reſt in nothing ſhort of repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Theſe are the terms of ſalvation.

If you aſk, how you ſhall obtain this faith; the Apoſtle ſays, "faith comes by hearing." Hear the word of God with diligent attention, and give earneſt heed to the things which you hear, leſt, at any time, you ſhould let them ſlip.

You will ſay, "the word avails nothing without the Spirit." But remember, "God gives the Spirit in the hearing of faith. Pray always that he would fulfil in you the work of faith with power." "Quench not the Spirit." Abſtain from thoſe things, which tend to extinguiſh his kindly influences. Give entertainment to the ſerious and rational convictions excited in your minds. Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.

Some will aſk perhaps, ¿ Whether they can expect ſucceſs in ſuch a uſe of means, as any are capable of in their unregenerate ſtate?—We cannot promiſe men ſucceſs on any thing ſhort of a ſincere compliance with the goſpel. We aim, however, to addreſs them according to the different characters in which they appear. We would inſtruct the ignorant, alarm the thoughtleſs, undeceive

deceive the ſelf confident, and encourage the deſponding, and thus be made all things to all men, that we may by all means ſave ſome. We would place duty before all men, and urge it by goſpel motives. We would ſhew them the impoſſibility of obtaining ſalvation by ſtrict law; open the plan of grace, and preſs their compliance with it. When we hear them ſpeaking, and ſee them acting diſcreetly—when we obſerve in them an attention to their religious advantages, and an engagedneſs in the work of their ſalvation, we hope they are not far from the kingdom of God. We hope, the good work begun will be accompliſhed. But we exhort them to look to themſelves, that they loſe not the things, which they have gained. And we ſolemnly warn them, that if, after they have eſcaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Chriſt, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worſe with them, than the beginning.

THE END OF THE FORTYNINTH SERMON.

SERMON L.

Micah's Confidence and Disappointment in his Priest.

JUDGES xvii. 13.

Then said Micah, Now I know that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.

GOD instituted, for the church of Israel, a form of worship adapted to their circumstances, and to that age of the world. Its peculiar ordinances were designed to guard them against the superstitions of the heathens, and to preserve them from disunion among themselves.

Before the temple at Jerusalem was built, God appointed, that his tabernacle should be placed in Shiloh, and that the tribes should there assemble, at the great festivals instituted in the law.

To

To perform the common ſervice of the tabernacle the tribe of Levi was ſeparated; and from this tribe the family of Aaron was ſelected for the peculiar duties of the prieſthood; ſuch as offering ſacrifice, burning incenſe, expounding the law, and enquiring at the oracle.

The continued enjoyment of God's favour depended on a faithful adherence to his inſtitutions.

The Jews, though fully inſtructed in the true and acceptable worſhip of God, ſoon began to corrupt it by human inventions. Inſtead of aſſembling at the place where God had recorded his name, they choſe other places of worſhip according to their own humour.—Inſtead of attending on the miniſtrations of the orderly prieſts, who were ſet apart and educated for their office, they made prieſts of the loweſt of the people. Inſtead of directing their adorations to the one Supreme God, they worſhipped the heathen deities, which were but creatures of imagination, or ſenſeleſs idols formed by art and man's device.

The firſt ſucceſsful attempt to introduce idolatry into the church of Iſrael, is related in the chapter where our text is, and in the next following. Previous attempts, indeed, had been made; but thoſe, being open and publick, gave an alarm, and were immediately oppoſed. This was made more privately, and in a time of political confuſion, when there was no king—no ſettled government, in Iſrael; and therefore it met with no effectual oppoſition.

The idolatry, which finally proved the ruin of the Jews, began in the houſe of Micah; was here carried on by a vagrant Levite; from hence it was transferred to the tribe of Dan; and there it continued, until the ark of God was taken by the Philiſtines, and the tabernacle removed from Shiloh. After this, it was for a time ſuppreſſed; but, in the reign of Jeroboam, it was again revived, and was never wholly and finally extirpated until the Babylonian captivity.

This Micah was of Mount Ephraim. He lived in the ſame houſe with his mother, who probably was a widow. She had, by ſome means, collected a quantity of ſilver, which Micah ſtole from her. Vexed at her loſs, ſhe uttered ſuch dreadful imprecations as frightened him into a confeſſion of the theft, and reſtitution of the ſilver.

The fond mother now bleſſes her ſon, and ſays, "This ſilver I had wholly dedicated to the Lord, to JEHOVAH, for my ſon, to make a graven image and a molten image." She did not intend to renounce the God of Iſrael; but to worſhip him by an image, which ſhe conſidered as having the divine preſence reſiding in it. This, though not the groſſeſt kind of idolatry, yet was an impious degradation of the glory, and a vile corruption of the worſhip of that infinite and inviſible Spirit, of whom there can be no corporeal ſimilitude. And it naturally led to ſtill more groſs ſuperſtition. When men begin to depart from God, they can preſcribe to themſelves no bounds. They know not how far they ſhall wander, where they

they ſhall make a ſtand, nor how they ſhall return. God has inſtituted the order of his houſe. If forſaking this, we follow our own inventions, we ſhall ſoon fall under the power of a wild imagination, and become ſubject to the influence of infernal artifice; and there is but a precarious hope, that we ſhall recover ourſelves out of the ſnare.

Micah agreed to his mother's propoſal. The ſilver was given to an artificer, who made thereof a molten, and a graven image. Theſe Micah placed in his houſe. He then made an *ephod* in imitation of the pontifical veſtments, and *teraphim* in reſemblance of the urim and thummim; and he conſecrated one of his ſons for a family prieſt. Well pleaſed, no doubt, he was with this fine device. He had not renounced the God of Iſrael: He had only contrived to pay him an eaſy ſervice. He ſhould be excuſed from the trouble of going to Shiloh, and attending at the tabernacle, for he had gods and a prieſt in his houſe. It appears, from the next chapter, that his neighbours were drawn into the ſame ſuperſtition; and neglecting the inſtituted worſhip of the ſanctuary, they attended on the miniſtrations of this new fangled prieſt.

Some time after this, a young man, who, by his father's ſide, was a Levite, wandering about for employment, or perhaps for an eaſier ſubſiſtence, came to the houſe of Micah. In thoſe days of anarchy, the Levites were probably neglected; and this youth, quitting the ſervice of the taber-

nacle, travelled the country in queſt of a better livelihood.

Micah enquired, who and whence he was; and, learning that he was a Levite, he invited him to officiate in his houſe, as a prieſt. For this ſervice he promiſed him food and raiment, and ten ſhekels of ſilver by the year. "And the Levite was *content* to dwell with the man, and he became unto him as one of his ſons; and Micah conſecrated the Levite, who became his prieſt."—"Now," ſays he, "I *know* that the Lord will do me good, ſeeing I have a *Levite* to my prieſt."

This Levite, however, had no better right to the prieſthood than Micah's ſon; for, by divine inſtitution, this office was confined to Aaron's family. It was an impious preſumption in Micah to attempt the conſecration of a prieſt, and in the Levite to accept it from his hands. This ſervice belonged not to every man; but was aſſigned to the prieſts themſelves. And, indeed, if the Levite had been of the prieſtly order, and regularly conſecrated, he was ſtill groſsly impious in favouring Micah's ſuperſtition, and in encouraging his ſeparation from the appointed place, and inſtituted form of divine worſhip.

But his motive was to obtain a ſubſiſtence. Little encouragement had he hitherto found in his excurſions. A maintenance is now offered. Rather than forego the advantage, he will alter his religion, and comply with the humour of the man, on whom he is dependent.

Of

Of the ſame complexion were Jeroboam's prieſts. When the king erected his golden calves in Dan and Bethel, the orderly prieſts and Levites forſook him. They refuſed to aſſiſt in his idolatrous worſhip. He, therefore, made prieſts of the loweſt of the people, who, being in needy circumſtances, readily accepted the appointment, to ſecure for themſelves a ſubſiſtence.

Theſe idolatrous prieſts, and the falſe prophets who acted in concert with them, and the rulers who patronized them, are the men ſo often condemned, in the writings of the prophets, as devoted to worldly gain. "The heads judge for reward, and the prieſts teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money." The regular, ſtanding prieſts are not the perſons here intended; for they had no occaſion to teach for hire: A ſtated proviſion was by the divine law made for them. But the idolatrous prieſts, who went about to make diviſions in God's church, and to corrupt men from the purity of his worſhip, *theſe* "taught for hire." "They loved gifts, followed after rewards, and cried, *Give ye.*"—"They looked to their way, every one for his gain from his quarter."—"They were blind watchmen; ſhepherds who could not underſtand; they rejected knowledge, and forgot the law."—"They ate up the ſins, and ſet their hearts on the iniquities of the people." They lived on the ſin offerings of the people; and took pleaſure in their tranſgreſſions, becauſe the more tranſgreſſions among the people, the more ſin offerings for the prieſts to conſume.

Therefore

Therefore God ſays, "He would reject them from being prieſts"—would diſown them in their aſſumed, but proſtituted character.

They, who, according to God's inſtitution, miniſtered at the altar, had a right to partake of the altar. And ſo ſtill, they who preach the goſpel, have a right to live of the goſpel. But the man who deſires to be put into the prieſt's office, only that he may get a piece of ſilver, and eat a morſel of bread, is unworthy of the truſt; "for, for a piece of bread, that man will trangreſs." On the ſame motive, on which he accepted, he will profane, or deſert his office.

This Levite was a tranſient perſon; he came from a diſtance; he had nothing, but his own word, to recommend him. Micah took him into his ſervice, with haſty and implicit confidence, and without proper information; and no wonder if he was deeeived.

"I know," ſays he, "that the Lord will do me good, becauſe I have a Levite to my prieſt." Poor, deluded man! If Aaron or Samuel had been his prieſt, he was not to hope that the Lord would do him good, unleſs he attended to his own duty. "Let no man glory in man," ſays the Apoſtle; "for, ¿ Who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but miniſters, by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"

Some promiſe themſelves much good, becauſe they worſhip God in ſuch a place, and hear ſuch kind of preaching: But they ſhould remember, that all things are of God; that the beſt miniſters are

inſtruments

inſtruments in his hands; that God will then do them good, when they ſtrictly conform to his inſtitutions, humbly rely on his grace, and ſeek his bleſſing in the way which he has appointed.

Had Micah conſidered, that he had forſaken God's tabernacle—had corrupted the purity of divine worſhip—had choſen for his prieſt a man unauthoriſed and unrecommended—had taken him implicitly, and conſecrated him preſumptuouſly, he muſt have ſeen, that God would not do him good at all the more for his having this man to his prieſt. If we are dependent on God for the good which we deſire, we muſt ſeek it of him in the manner which he preſcribes.

Let us purſue our ſtory a little farther, that we may learn how far Micah's expectations were anſwered.

The tribe of Danites, being ſtraitened in their inheritance, ſent five men to explore the country for a new plantation. Theſe meſſengers, in their journey, came to Mount Ephraim, and, lodging near Micah's houſe, they heard the voice of the young Levite; probably as he was performing religious ſervice; and they immediately recollected him; for as he had lived a vagrant life, they, perhaps, had heard him hold forth before. They turned in to ſee him; and, finding, that he had commenced a prieſt, was dreſſed in the pontifical robes, and furniſhed with images and teraphim, they informed him of the object of their expedition, and deſired him to enquire of God concerning their ſucceſs. Loſt to all ſenſe of pie-

ty,

ty, he, after a formal pretence of conſulting the oracle, anſwered, "Go in peace; before the Lord is your way." As he had aſſumed the office and habiliments of the prieſthood, he would decline no part of the ſacred function, leſt he ſhould baulk his employers, and loſe credit with his patron.

High pretenſions to divine intercourſe, to viſions, illuminations, ſupernatural diſcoveries, and heavenly directions, are common with impoſtors: Thus they deceive the hearts of the ſimple, beguile unſtable ſouls, and draw away diſciples after them.

One ſinner deſtroys much good, and more in proportion to the publicity of the character in which he acts. This diſhoneſt Levite, officiating as an idolatrous prieſt, corrupted the religion of all around him. He collected a conſiderable number of people in the vicinity to attend on his miniſtry. Some, it is probable, were captivated by the novelty of his ceremonies—ſome might be pleaſed with the idea of having a prieſt ſo near them—ſome perhaps admired his great ſanctity and indifference to the world; for he had only his victuals and clothes, and ten ſhekels by the year; and Micah paid him all this—And he might alſo have ſome popular talents: He ſeems to have had a ſtrong and vehement utterance, and a peculiar tone of voice. For the Danites heard and recogniſed him as they paſſed along in the ſtreet. It is ſaid, "They knew his voice."

Theſe

Theſe adventurers, having ſearched the land whither they were ſent, returned with a favourable account, which encouraged the tribe to begin a plantation there. For this purpoſe, there were raiſed ſix hundred men in arms, who, conducted by the five ſpies, marched through the village, where Micah lived; and, being informed of the ſilver images, and other religious utenſils in his houſe, they concerted a ſcheme to rob it. The armed men, drawn up at the gate, ſent in the five ſpies, who, being conſidered as friends, were received without ſuſpicion. They immediately took the images, ephod and teraphim, and carried them out to their brethren at the gate. The prieſt, ſurpriſed at the freedom of his old friends, began to expoſtulate. But they ſoon ſatisfied him. "Hold thy peace;" ſay they, "lay thy hand on thy mouth; go with us, and be to us a father and a prieſt. ¿ Is it better for thee to be a prieſt unto the houſe of one man; or that thou be a prieſt unto a tribe and family in Iſrael?— "And the prieſt's heart was glad: He took the ephod, teraphim and images, and went away in the midſt of the people."

This is that prieſt, for whoſe ſake, Micah *knew*, the Lord would do him good!

When the young man was wandering about for a ſubſiſtence, he thought a little would ſuffice him. His food and raiment, with a few ſhekels for contingencies, he eſteemed a decent proviſion; and, at firſt, "he was content." But when he found that he grew more important, he began to

aſpire

aſpire after greater things. To be a prieſt in a ſmall village, on a moderate maintenance, and for this to be dependent on a ſingle man, was now too humiliating. As ſoon as he heard the propoſal of an advantageous tranſlation, "his heart was glad." He accepted the offer without heſitation; and into his own hallowed hands he received the ſacred images, which had been violently taken out of Micah's chapel, and bare them triumphantly away in the midſt of the armed ruffians.

Theſe Danites ſoon built a city on their new plantation; here they ſet up their ſtolen images; this Levite became their prieſt, and his ſons ſucceeded him.

In vain Micah collects his neighbours, and purſues the robbers. In vain he exclaims, "Ye have taken away my gods and the prieſt; and, ¿What have I more?" They anſwered, "Let not thy voice be heard among us, leſt angry fellows run upon thee, and thou loſe thy life."—"When he ſaw that they were too ſtrong for him, he turned and went back to his houſe." And glad he was to eſcape ſo.

¿What thinks Micah now of his vagrant prieſt?—As heavenly and diſintereſted as he was, he could leave his ſmall charge for a more lucrative ſettlement.

Perhaps he thought, that his abilities were here too much confined, and that his labours would be more uſeful in a larger ſphere. ¿But could he, on this principle, be juſtified in joining to rob his patron's chapel?

Though

Though he profeſſed to enjoy a heavenly intercourſe, and to receive divine reſponſes, yet, in this caſe, he never aſked counſel of God or man. The call was clear—there was no room to deliberate—a richer living preſented itſelf, and his former contract was at end.

Micah muſt, by this time be aſhamed of his raſh confidence in a ſtranger.

Leaving him now to his own reflections, we will animadvert, a moment, on theſe Danites.

Being about to form a new ſettlement, they determined to have ſome kind of religious worſhip among them. Whether it was rational, or idolatrous—inſtituted by God, or invented by man, they were not ſolicitous; but ſome form or other they would have.

They ſeem to have been but an ignorant collection. They probably had neglected the ſtated worſhip of God in Shiloh, and hence were more eaſily ſeduced to idolatry. None are ſo liable to error and deluſion, as they who deſpiſe the orders of God's houſe. Among theſe you will always ſee impoſtors the moſt buſy and the moſt ſucceſsful. They ſeldom practiſe their arts on thoſe, who by reaſon of uſe have their ſenſes exerciſed to diſcern both good and evil. That chriſtians may hold faſt their profeſſion without wavering, the Apoſtle adviſes, that they forſake not the aſſembling of themſelves together.

Theſe Danites, in their zeal for religion, robbed Micah's chapel, and ſeduced his chaplain; and, when he complained of the wrong, they

threatened

threatened his life. ¿ Did they think, that God was pleaſed only with external forms—that he had no regard to juſtice, truth and mercy ?—We condemn their conduct. ¿ But is there nothing like it to be ſeen among chriſtians ?—If we tear in pieces one church in order to build up another—if we cauſe diviſions and ſeparations in one religious ſociety in order to collect out of it another of our own complexion and denomination, when, at the ſame time, we profeſs ſubſtantially to agree in doctrine and practice with the ſociety, which we thus diſturb; we act preciſely in the ſpirit of theſe Danites, who robbed Micah's chapel, that they might furniſh their own; ſtole his image, that they might worſhip it themſelves; and enticed away his prieſt, that they might enjoy his miniſtrations.

Religion is a matter of moſt ſerious importance, and we are to act in it with engagedneſs and zeal. But it is a reaſonable, ſelfconſiſtent ſervice, and our zeal muſt be honeſt and peaceable. We may no more lie to make God's truth and glory abound, than to make our own wealth and honour abound. He hates robbery, as much for an offering on his altar, as for an offering at the ſhrine of ambition and avarice. If fraud and artifice, duplicity and injuſtice are criminal in their nature, we cannot change their nature by applying them to a godly deſign.

The ſubſtance of religion conſiſts in righteouſneſs, mercy, truth and the love of God. To promote theſe, is the proper uſe of all inſtituted forms

of

of worſhip. If we maintain our favourite forms at the expenſe of real virtues, we invert the order of things; our devotion becomes ſuperſtition, and our religious worſhip reſembles the idolatry of the Danites.

We ſee, in the caſe before us, the importance of a ſtrict adherence to the order of God's houſe. When once we depart from this, we know not how far we ſhall run, nor how many we ſhall draw along with us.

Let us only conſider, how idolatry began and ſpread in the land of Iſrael. It was firſt ſuggeſted by a woman to her ſon. He ſet it up in his own houſe, and withdrew from the tabernacle of God. After a while he called in a ſtraggling Levite and conſecrated him for a prieſt. By the influence of this unprincipled Levite the families in the vicinity were corrupted. By and by the man carried his idols and ſuperſtition into the tribe of Dan. There they continued for a number of years, even all the time that the houſe of God was in Shiloh. After idolatry ſeemed to be ſuppreſſed, there was ſtill in this tribe, an inclination to favour it. When Jeroboam ſet up his golden calves, he placed one in Dan, as the tribe which would moſt readily receive it. Dan, in alluſion to the old ſerpent, who brought ſin into the world, is called "a ſerpent in the way, and an adder in the path, which biteth the horſe's heels, ſo that his rider falleth backward." This revolt proved the ruin of the nation. No warnings of the prophets, or judgments of heaven

would reclaim them, until they were given up to a captivity of seventy years.

As the tribe of Dan had the principal influence in the introduction and support of idolatry in the earthly Canaan, so, when the hundred and forty and four thousand were sealed out of the tribes of Israel, as heirs of the heavenly Canaan, this tribe was utterly excluded.

Who would have expected such lasting and extensive mischief from an error, which began in a private family, and was suggested by an obscure woman?

Important is the Apostle's caution to the Hebrews—"Look diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."

Never let us venture to violate the plain institutions of God, nor to substitute in their place the inventions of men. We are only then to hope for his blessing, when we seek it in the way of his appointment. If we attempt innovations in the order of his house, the guilt begins with us, but the mischief may spread wide, and last long. It is dangerous to make new experiments in religion.

We find ourselves, perhaps, agreeably entertained, and think we are greatly edified, by attending on some new and transient preacher, who assumes a new name, exhibits some new forms, and appears chiefly on days which God has not sequestered for his worship. But let us not mistake the mere emotions of passion for godly

ly edification. The novelty of the ſcene may move us for a time, but when the ſcene is familiarized, the emotions will ſubſide.

We are never to look for ſpiritual advantage in a departure from God's appointments.

When our hearts are formed to the love of holineſs, and our lives are filled with good works, then may we conclude, that we are really edified: And this edification comes by attendance on God's inſtitutions. Chriſt has given paſtors and teachers for the perfecting of his ſaints, and the edifying of his Church. And it is by attending on their miniſtry, that we make increaſe to the edifying of ourſelves in love. If we diſturb the peace, and break the unity of his church, in order to our perſonal edification, we miſtake the means, and ſhall miſs of the end. Chriſtians are a mutual comfort, when they are fellow workers to the kingdom of God; therefore ſtudy the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith you may edify one another.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.